PATTERNS

OF

POWER

The Qing Conquest of China

The Complete Study

1583 — 1644 — 1912

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with Claude (Anthropic)

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the *Patterns of Power* series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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PREFACE

PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the *Patterns of Power* series, applying the series' framework to the Qing conquest and rule of China, from the killing of Nurhaci's father and grandfather in 1583 and the entry through the Shanhai Pass in 1644 to the abdication of February 1912. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed, and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam that manages the belief on which the whole depends, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running through all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like solutions because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers.

The Qing were chosen because they isolate two variables the series had been carrying without separating.

The first is the metropole. Every colonial case in this collection is shaped by a seam running through distance — a home public whose belief funds and mans the conquest, a colonial reality that public must not be shown, and an order whose central administrative task is keeping the two ends from meeting. The Qing had none of it. The court moved to Beijing in the autumn of 1644 and never went home, because there was no home to go to. Remove the metropole and the framework's colonial predictions do not merely weaken; several of them invert. The robe, which a colonial order cuts for the metropole whose belief it needs, here turns and faces the conquered, because they are the only audience left — and it is borrowed from them entire, so that a Manchu emperor defends his right to rule by citing Mencius, and kneels nine times at the tomb of Confucius with no armed rival anywhere in his empire. Formation, which a colonial

order withholds from the majority because forming them would mean admitting them, was here restored within two years of the conquest with its curriculum untouched.

The second is the boundary itself. An examination in Qing China admitted a Chinese man to the Grand Council and never to the banners. That distinction — office open, caste closed — is the study's spine, and it explains what the collection's other cases leave unexplained: how a hundred thousand men held two hundred million for two hundred and sixty-eight years, why they could afford to be so generous with education, and why the arrangement finally came apart not when the conquered rose but when the dynasty abolished the examinations in 1905 and cut the standing out from under the class that had been holding it up.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction, and the judgement of the whole, and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying load-bearing quotations, dates and figures by web search against sources reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, applying the framework module by module, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. Where the research contradicted the framework's expectation, or contradicted the working notes the collaboration had carried into the study, the research was followed and the expectation revised; the framework is scaffolding and a lens, not a cage, and several of this study's better findings are corrections to what it had predicted.

Its engine throughout is the method of information asymmetry: the exact public words set beside the exact words of the ground, the arithmetic laid out and the sum left to the reader. Here the asymmetry does not run between a colony and a capital. It runs between what an order says its legitimacy rests on and what it kills people for writing about — between an emperor arguing from the Confucian canon that a barbarian may hold the Mandate of Heaven, and the same dynasty beheading the men who owned a copy of a private history of the Ming.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources — edicts, proclamations, stone tablets, classical texts, memorials — are quoted exactly, in the original where the wording is the evidence, because in a legal fiction the precise words *are* the argument. Modern

copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased, briefly, and credited. Where an English rendering of a Chinese text appears above and the standard translation is in copyright, the translation is the collaboration's own, made against the Chinese, and the published version is named as consulted rather than reproduced.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. What could not be verified is dropped or flagged, never guessed — and this study flags a great deal, because several of its most-quoted texts survive only in secondary compilations citing editions the collaboration has not seen. Contested figures are given as ranges, and this case has more of them, and wider ones, than most: the population of late Ming China, the dead of the Taiping, the books destroyed in the Four Treasuries, and the Dzungar dead are all spans rather than numbers, and the reasons for the spans are stated where they matter.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity, and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation. Its recurring watchword is that legibility is not pardon: to understand how a thing was done is not to forgive its being done. Equally, naming an origin as built is not a debunking — a conquest that has been absorbed until it feels like the shape of the world has become genuinely real, and the men defending it are not dupes.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework, stated plainly in its closing section, rather than merely applying the framework to the case.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is treated as something discovered and tested against the evidence, not handed down as doctrine — a tendency, never a law, and one that is corrected wherever the record refuses it.

What the Qing added to the framework

Because this is the collection's only conquest without a metropole, and its clearest instance of a small caste governing a vastly larger self-running civilisation, it was able to isolate several mechanisms the colonial cases obscure.

Chief among the refinements the study contributed: that a legitimating doctrine can contain its own *transfer clause* — a mandate forfeitable by misgovernment and read off the people's condition — so that the conqueror needs to build nothing and need only win, at the price of a permanent inability to discuss his own origin; that where the

conquered order already runs alienable private property in a working register, the conqueror needs no legal fiction about land at all, and the settlement's boundary moves from the deed to the *roll*; that a settlement paying a hereditary caste in claims on a treasury while forbidding it production fails demographically, and the state then culls the caste rather than reducing the claim, reaching for an ancestry criterion that was never the condition of entry; that a borrowed robe cannot distinguish a conqueror's subjects from his enemies, who are wearing it too, so that a separate *bodily mark* of submission becomes necessary and must be read as an instrument of the floor rather than an article of the doctrine; that formation's depth is measured by what it makes *unthinkable* rather than by what it makes believed, that its cheapest form is the one the ruled finance themselves with the state supplying only certification, and that an imposed formation is fought by the generation receiving it and inherited by their grandchildren, the tell being a piece of vernacular the state never issued; that where the surplus is extracted privately and the state's own cut is trivial, the state receives the compliance and the intermediary receives the hatred; that exit need not be blocked but can be *steered*, which is cheaper; that where an order keeps more than one treasury the line between them is likely to be a caste line, and the unaudited one holds the settlement's real terms; that a private channel to the sovereign is a *public silence among his servants*, dissolving collective remonstrance without legislating against it; that the catalogue of an order's prosecutions is a map of its load-bearing claim, so that a borrowed robe produces historical rather than doctrinal persecution; that the strongest default is not the largest benefit but the *shortest ladder out*, and that a quota which limits a man also entitles him; that secret designation of an heir belongs on the menu as a distinct answer, working by withdrawing the information a faction needs rather than by removing the claimants; that a liberty is a distribution of expected loss whose durability is predictable at the moment of grant by counting the beneficiaries with standing; that breakdown changes the filter allocating command rather than the authorship of structural change; that a commander with the force to seize declines when his standing is denominated in a currency only the existing arrangement can mint; that a default can *lapse* rather than fracture, leaving no battle to date and a defection counted in jurisdictions; and that an order carrying a population above the land's bare capacity holds a metabolic debt whose maturity date is the next coordination failure, and which the record will attribute to weather.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own evocative title.

Landscape — the two orders on the eve. **The Essay and the Arrow.** A civilisation whose machine ran so well it survived two decades with nobody at the desk, and a people, a script and a hereditary warrior caste assembled from nothing within living memory beyond its wall — with the Ming's own founding proclamation of 1367 conceding, in writing, that the Mongol conquest had held Heaven's mandate.

1 — The Floor of Force. **The White Cloth on Their Backs.** A hundred thousand men entering an empire of two hundred million by invitation, thirty-nine years to finish what they had started, and a floor built out of the people they had conquered — beginning with the rags Wu Sangui's soldiers tied on so the Manchus could tell them from the other Chinese army.

2 — The Settlement. **Four Taels a Room.** Enclosure by rope with no jurisprudence at all, a capital repartitioned at a clerk's rate per room, a caste paid in heritable claims and forbidden to produce — and a conquered elite bought with the previous dynasty's confiscated estates.

3 — The Robe. **Those Who Comply Are the People of Our State.** A dynasty that imported no doctrine, took up the conquered order's entire vocabulary, knelt nine times at the sage's tomb, and required every adult male in the empire to carry the mark of submission on his head.

4 — Formation. **To Every Hair and Bit of Skin.** The sentence a Chinese boy learned at six, why it made two hundred million people cheap to govern by thirteen hundred magistrates, what happened when a conqueror wrote a new instruction onto a body already carrying an old one, and whether the conquest caste was formed the same way.

5 — The Cost Column. **Two Days' Wage.** What the emperor took from an ordinary man, what the landlord took, what the village gentleman took in between, what the subject got back, and why nobody had to be trapped in a country where the state paid people to leave.

6 — Extraction. **The Quota and the Surplus.** A land tax frozen for a century, a monopoly on the salt of four hundred million people, a customs house run by the

emperor's bondservants, the fur and pearls and jade of half a continent — and a second treasury the Board of Revenue was not permitted to audit.

7 — Information and Suppression. **Not One Word of Proposal.** A stone cut in every school in the empire forbidding the lowest degree-holders to petition, associate or publish; a locked leather box that made officials strangers to one another; and a dynasty that killed over history and left theology alone.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. **The Box Behind the Tablet.** The chain audited from throne to village gentleman, a succession solved by withdrawing the information a faction needs, a quota that entitles as it limits, and a state that sold entry to its own settlement until it had manufactured a million men with a stake and no chair.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. **Sixty-One Northern Names.** A quota won in 1397 by a faction that was wrong on the merits and held for five centuries, set beside an edict of religious toleration that lasted thirty-two years and died to a memorial — and the emancipation of the debased that decayed because nobody with standing lost anything by ignoring it.

10 — Change and Collapse. **Fourteen Provinces.** The largest rising in human history and why it changed nothing, the army raised to defeat it and the man who stood it down, and the six years in which a dynasty dismantled the arrangement that had made its own elite defend it.

11 — The Grim Accounting. **The River Went North.** What the sword took at the founding and on the frontier, what a century of coordination built above what the bare land could carry, and the day in June 1855 when a government fighting for its life could not close a breach and a river abandoned the course it had held since 1194.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. **Two Doors.** The Qing placed among the conquests that take the apparatus rather than build one; and the strongest case for the defence, stated in full in its own voice — including the argument that the Chinese elite chose this arrangement for two and a half centuries — and answered without flinching.

A note on sources. This front matter is descriptive and makes no primary-source claims of its own; every factual assertion about the case is established, with its sources and with its limits marked, in the module it summarises. The framework it describes is the series'; the disciplines it lists are the ones the modules hold themselves to and document in their

own closing notes. Readers should note in particular that this study was unable to consult any Manchu-language source, and that the *Jiu Manzhou dang* and the Manchu veritable records remain research targets rather than sources used — a limitation that bears on the landscape and on the modules dealing with the banner caste. *Part of the collection* Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*

LANDSCAPE

THE ESSAY AND THE ARROW

Landscape · the two orders on the eve — a civilisation whose machine ran so well it survived two decades with nobody at the desk, and a people, a script and a hereditary warrior caste assembled out of nothing within living memory beyond its wall

The arithmetic at the pass

Begin with the numbers, because every question this study asks is a question about how they were possible.

When the banner armies came through the Shanhai Pass in the summer of 1644, the establishment they represented consisted of three hundred and nine complete Manchu companies and eighteen incomplete ones, a hundred and seventeen complete Mongol companies and five incomplete, and a hundred and fifty-seven complete Chinese companies and five incomplete — five hundred and eighty-three whole companies and twenty-eight fragments, each company nominally three hundred men. Add the bondservants, the auxiliaries and the non-banner Han allies and the total force available to the Qing that year is usually put somewhere between a hundred and ten thousand and a hundred and fifty thousand men. The population of the country they were entering cannot be stated so precisely, because the Ming state counted taxpayers rather than people and its own registers were returning between fifty-one and sixty-two million when every gazetteer in the empire knew the figure was fiction; modern estimates for the late Ming run from about a hundred and fifty million to about two hundred million, and the demography is contested at the scale of tens of millions, so the range must stand as a range. Take the low end of the population and the high end of the army and the ratio is still on the order of one armed conqueror to a thousand conquered.

That is not a conquest in any sense the word ordinarily carries. No force of that size can hold a country of that size by force. It can win battles, and it can take a capital, and it did both; but the machinery that would actually collect the grain, hear the lawsuits, dredge the canals, register the households and keep two hundred million people in their villages was going to have to be a machinery that already existed and was already believed in, staffed by men who were already trained and who would go on turning up for work.

The Qing conquest is legible only as the capture of an apparatus, and the first job of this landscape is therefore to describe the apparatus — what it was, what it ran on, how deep it went, and how it had come to seem to the men inside it not like an arrangement at all but like the shape of the world.

The second job is to describe the men who took it, and here the ordinary vocabulary misleads even more badly. The words *Manchu* and *Qing* both name things that did not exist when the men who used them were born. The name *Manchu* was proclaimed on 12 November 1635; the name *Qing* the following year; the eight banners into which every one of those men was enrolled had been assembled between about 1601 and 1615; the script in which their state kept its records was devised in 1599 and given its diacritical dots and circles only in 1632. A grandfather at the pass in 1644 could remember a world with none of these things in it. That matters more than it looks, and it is the hinge of the whole study: a conquest caste that has only just been made into a people is a different object from an ancient nobility, and the anxieties of a manufactured identity are visible in the record from the first generation onward.

And the third job is the one this collection insists on and which is easiest to skip. The order the Manchus met was not an original or an aboriginal order. It was itself a conquest that had been naturalised until it looked like nature — and, unusually, it said so in its own founding document.

What the Ming said about barbarian conquest, in writing, in 1367

In the autumn of 1367 Zhu Yuanzhang, then styling himself Prince of Wu and about to send Xu Da north against the Mongol capital, issued a proclamation to the population of the north China plain. The text is preserved in the Veritable Records of the Ming and is traditionally ascribed to Song Lian, though the ascription is doubted on chronological grounds and the piece appears in no early edition of his collected works. Its most famous clause supplied a slogan to Chinese nationalism for the next five and a half centuries: 驅逐胡虜，恢復中華，立綱陳紀，救濟斯民 — expel the Hu caitiffs, restore Zhonghua, set up the bonds and lay out the rules, relieve these people. The revolutionaries who ended the Qing in 1911 were still using a version of that line.

But read what stands beside it. The proclamation opens by asserting the ordinary Sinocentric arrangement — 自古帝王臨御天下，皆中國居內以制夷狄，夷狄居

外以奉中國，未聞以夷狄居中國而制天下也, that from antiquity the rulers who governed all under Heaven did so with the Central Country within controlling the Yi and Di without, who resided outside and served it, and that it had never been heard of that Yi and Di should dwell in the Central Country and govern the realm from it — and then, immediately, in the same breath, it concedes the case: 自宋祚傾移，元以北狄入主中國，四海以內，罔不臣服，此豈人力，實乃天授. Since the Song's fortune shifted, the Yuan, as northern Di, entered and became masters of the Central Country; within the four seas there were none who did not submit; how could this be human power — truly it was Heaven's bestowal.

Truly it was Heaven's bestowal. The founding manifesto of the dynasty that expelled the Mongols records, as an established fact requiring no argument, that the Mongol conquest of China had been legitimate, that Heaven had given it, and that the early Yuan rulers had been enlightened and their officials good. What the proclamation actually charges is not usurpation but degeneration: that the later Yuan abandoned the norms, that succession was settled by fratricide and poison, that the bonds between father and son, ruler and servant, husband and wife were profaned, and that in consequence 天厭其德而棄之 — Heaven grew weary of their virtue and cast them off. And the document ends by opening a door it would have been simpler to leave shut: 如蒙古、色目，雖非華夏族類，然同生天地之間，有能知禮義，願為臣民者，與中夏之人撫養無異 — as for Mongols and Semu, though not of the Hua-Xia stock, yet they are born between the same Heaven and earth, and those who can understand the rites and righteousness and are willing to be subjects shall be cherished no differently from the people of the Central Xia.

Set that beside the same document's line that barbarian fortunes never last a hundred years, and one has, in a single text, the entire legitimating apparatus that the Manchus would walk into two hundred and seventy-seven years later and use. Conquest by an outsider is not itself illegitimate — Heaven can bestow it. What legitimates is the rites. An outsider who takes up the rites is not an outsider. And a dynasty falls not because it was foreign but because it lost the norms.

This did not have to be so. Plenty of orders make their legitimacy inalienable — the bloodline is sacred, or the office descends only through the priesthood, or the god has chosen a house and not a virtue. The Chinese doctrine did the opposite, and did it explicitly, in canonical texts every examination candidate in the empire had memorised. The *Book of Poetry* says 天命靡常, Heaven's mandate is not constant. The *Book of*

Documents says that great Heaven has no partial affections and helps only the virtuous, and that Heaven sees as the people see and hears as the people hear. And Mencius, canonised as one of the Four Books and required reading for every man who ever sat an examination in this country, disposes of the question of regicide in three sentences that James Legge rendered thus: asked by King Hsüan of Ch'î whether a minister may put his sovereign to death, Mencius answers that a man who outrages benevolence is called a robber and a man who outrages righteousness a ruffian, that such a man is a mere fellow, and — 'I have heard of the cutting off of the fellow Châu, but I have not heard of the putting a sovereign to death, in his case.'

A doctrine of legitimacy which holds that the mandate is not permanent, that it is forfeited by misgovernment, that Heaven's judgement is read off the people's condition, and that killing a ruler who has forfeited it is not regicide, is a doctrine with a transfer clause written into it. It legitimates whoever is currently winning, and it does so in advance, without needing to be rewritten. For any incumbent this is a live danger and the reason emperors were so exercised about omens, floods and comets. For a conqueror it is the cheapest robe in the record: pre-cut, universally accepted, and requiring of him nothing but victory and the visible performance of rites. What it does not do is stay bought. The same clause that admits him remains available to be read against his descendants, and by the last decades of the Qing it would be.

Four hundred and thirty years of the north

The concession in the 1367 proclamation was not generosity. It was a description of the recent past, and the past in question was long.

Beijing — the city the Manchus would take, the capital they would keep — had not been governed from a Chinese court since 938, when Shi Jingtang of the Later Jin, himself a Shatuo Turk, ceded the sixteen prefectures of Yan and Yun to the Khitan in payment for the cavalry that made him emperor. The Khitan turned Youzhou into their Southern Capital and administered the ceded counties with Chinese forms and Chinese clerks. The Song spent a century failing to get the territory back. In the 1120s the Jurchen of the Jin dynasty took it from the Khitan and then took the whole north, driving the Song court beyond the Yangtze; in the 1230s the Mongols took it from the Jurchen; and in 1271 the Mongols declared the Yuan and eventually took the rest. The north returned to a Central Plains dynasty only in 1368, when Xu Da's army entered Dadu. Four hundred and thirty years.

Over that span the population of the north had lived under Khitan, Jurchen and Mongol rule for longer than the Ming would last, and had gone on being administered by Chinese-style prefectures, county magistrates, tax registers and, intermittently, examinations. The institutions had proved detachable from the ethnicity of the men at the top — which is the practical meaning of the doctrine described above, and which is why the sixteenth-century gentleman who thought of the magistrate's yamen as simply the way government was did not think of it as anything a Mongol had operated, although Mongols had operated it for a century.

The detachability runs deeper than administration. The intellectual orthodoxy of late imperial China — the Cheng-Zhu reading of the classics, Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Four Books, the interpretive frame within which every scholar in the empire had learned to think about human nature, hierarchy and the state — was made the compulsory basis of the civil examinations by decree in 1313, with the first examinations under the new rules held in 1315. The emperor who issued that decree was Renzong of the Yuan, a Mongol. The canon that defined Chinese orthodoxy for the following six centuries, and that the Qing would find in place and leave in place, had been installed as state doctrine by a conquest dynasty. So had the administrative geometry: the Ming, on founding, took over the Yuan's arrangement of a single Secretariat superimposed on Six Ministries, and the provinces the Qing governed still carried a name derived from the Yuan's branch secretariats.

None of this makes the Ming order fake, and the point is emphatically not that the men who defended it against the Manchus were defending someone else's furniture. The opposite. A conquest that has been fully absorbed is more solid than one still being enforced, because nobody is enforcing it any more — it is simply what there is. By 1600 no Chinese scholar experienced the examination curriculum as a Mongol imposition; he experienced it as learning. No magistrate experienced his seal of office as a Khitan borrowing; he experienced it as government. The origins were known and had entirely ceased to be felt, which is the tell of a conquest that took. What the recursion establishes is only this: the conqueror of 1644 was not arriving in a state of nature. He was arriving in the fourth or fifth layer of a building whose earlier storeys had been laid by people very like himself, and the building had learned, in the process, exactly how to be taken over.

The ladder

The device at the centre of the apparatus was an examination.

Its shape by the late Ming was three-tiered. At the base sat the licensing examinations, held in the prefectures, whose graduates became *shengyuan* — licentiates, colloquially *xiucai* — entitled to wear distinguishing dress, exempt from corporal punishment and from labour service, permitted to deal with the magistrate as something other than a commoner. Above that, triennially in the provincial capitals, came the examination that produced *juren*, the recommended men, which was the threshold of real standing and the lowest rank from which office could be had. Above that, triennially at the capital, the metropolitan and palace examinations that produced *jinshi*, the presented scholars, who were guaranteed appointment and from whom the empire's senior civil officials were drawn.

The numbers are the point. Over the whole of the Ming — two hundred and seventy-six years, some eighty-nine metropolitan examinations — a total of 24,878 men became *jinshi*. Across late imperial China as a whole the passing rate at the entry examinations ran at roughly one or two in a hundred; of the licentiates so created, on nineteenth-century figures, something like five in a hundred took the provincial degree, and of those about one in five the metropolitan. Compounded, the chance that a man beginning at the bottom of the ladder would reach the top was of the order of one or two in ten thousand. Ho Ping-ti's much-argued figures show what happened to social openness across the same span: in the *jinshi* cohort of 1371, some three-quarters came from families with no degree-holder in the previous three generations; by 1661 that had fallen to under thirty per cent, and by 1890 to about a tenth. Later scholarship has tightened the screw further by noting that Ho counted only lineal ancestors and so missed the uncles and cousins through whom examination families actually operated.

What that machine does, considered coldly from the position of whoever is sitting at the top of it, is four things at once, and they are the reason it survived every dynastic change for six hundred years.

It recruits the men who can read, and thereby occupies the position from which anyone would be believed about what could not be checked. It disperses them: the rule of avoidance, in force in one form or another since the Han, barred an official from serving in his home province and rotated him through postings of three or four years, so that administrative competence could never harden into a local dynasty. It converts the standing problem of a surplus claimant class into a competition that the claimants themselves police, since a man who has failed the provincial examination four times generally concludes that he has failed rather than that the examination is a fraud —

Benjamin Elman's work on how candidates used the language of fate to explain their own failures is the best account of this, and it is worth dwelling on, because a selection device that persuades the rejected to blame themselves is doing work that no garrison could do. And it forms: the curriculum an aspirant memorised was not a technical syllabus but a moral one, so that the men who ended up administering the empire had spent their formative decades inside a text that told them what a good subject, a good son and a good official were.

The examination is therefore not merely a recruitment mechanism laid on top of the order. It is the order's principal instrument for making the belief that holds the order up, and it makes it most thoroughly in exactly those men who will be enforcing it. That is a very great deal of machinery to inherit, and it cost the inheritor nothing to run, because the candidates paid for their own preparation and the lineages paid for the tutors.

The state that was mostly not there

Set beside the ladder the thing the ladder fed, and the scale collapses in an instructive way.

G. William Skinner's count of county-level units through the dynasties gives roughly 1,180 in the Han, 1,255 in the Sui, 1,235 in the Tang, 1,230 in the Song, 1,115 in the Yuan, 1,385 in the Ming and 1,360 in the Qing. Over the same eighteen centuries the population went from perhaps sixty million to well over four hundred million. Counties were abolished as counties were created; the total scarcely moved. Whatever else the imperial Chinese state was, it was not an apparatus that grew to meet its population, and by the seventeenth century a county magistrate might have a hundred thousand people in his jurisdiction and perhaps twenty to forty clerks and runners to help him — a man posted among strangers whose dialect he often could not follow, forbidden to serve near his own kin, rotated out before he could learn very much, and expected to be father and mother to the people of his county.

An order with that ratio between officials and subjects is not governed by its officials. It is governed by everybody else, and the Ming had built the everybody else with some care. Households were bracketed into the *lijia*, tithings of a hundred and ten households responsible collectively for their own tax and labour returns; the land was written into the fish-scale registers and the people into the yellow registers. Above and around that, and increasingly doing the real work, sat the lineage — the corporate descent group with its written genealogy, its ancestral hall, its charitable estate, its own rules and its own

elders — and the gentry, the degree-holders and retired officials who mediated between the magistrate and the village, arbitrated disputes before they became lawsuits, organised the granaries and repaired the dykes, and were not paid to do any of it because the standing they got instead was worth more.

The lineage in its familiar late-imperial form is not ancient and its dating is a useful corrective to the notion of a timeless China. The ancestral hall had been an elite privilege; the classical rule permitted commoners no ancestral temple at all. It was the doctrinal quarrel at court known as the Great Rites Controversy, running through the 1520s over whether the Jiajing emperor might sacrifice to his own birth father, that broke the restriction open — and by 1536 the court had in effect conceded the point to commoners, after which halls and printed genealogies proliferated across the south. David Faure's account of this reads the corporate lineage as, in large part, a way for local society to write itself into the state's ritual language and thereby to hold land and status under it. Which is to say: the most important institution of Chinese local self-administration was, in its mature form, about a century older than the Manchu conquest.

The Ming had also legislated the liturgy of it. The Hongwu emperor's Six Maxims, promulgated in the *Placard of People's Instructions* of 1398 — 孝順父母，尊敬長上，和睦鄉里，教訓子孫，各安生理，毋作非為, be filial to your parents, respectful to your elders, harmonious with your neighbours, instruct your sons and grandsons, be content each in his calling, do no wrong — were to be carried through every village of the empire, by the old and the blind led by children, and were expounded at the village compacts by magistrates and local worthies for the next two and a half centuries. It is worth noticing what the third and fifth clauses are actually asking for. Be content in your calling, and stay where you are. The same emperor's favourite passage in the *Daodejing* imagines a state so small and a people so few that neighbouring states within sight of one another, whose cocks and dogs each could hear, would grow old and die without dealings between them. The Ming ideal was a country of villages nobody left.

Twenty years without an audience

There is a single fact that measures how well this ran, and it is worth stating flatly because nothing else in the corpus tests the proposition so severely.

The Wanli emperor came to the throne in 1572 and reigned for forty-eight years. From the 1580s onward, in the course of a fifteen-year quarrel with his own bureaucracy over which of his sons should be heir — a quarrel he lost, conceding in 1601 — he progressively withdrew from the business of ruling: ceasing to hold audiences, leaving memorials unanswered, and declining to fill vacant posts, so that senior offices stood empty for years at a time. In 1596 he attempted to run a parallel administration of eunuchs alongside the regular one and abandoned the attempt a decade later. Historians argue about what to call this — sloth, depression, or a calculated strike by a sovereign who had discovered that the only leverage he had over his officials was to stop cooperating with them — and Ray Huang's *1587, A Year of No Significance* is the classic argument that the emperor had become a prisoner of the very ritual system that made him supreme.

The argument about his motives is beside the present point. The point is what happened to the empire meanwhile, which is: not much. Taxes were assessed and collected. Examinations were held on schedule. Magistrates heard cases and were rotated. Canals were dredged. The Ming fought and won three major campaigns in the 1590s, including a full-scale war in Korea against Hideyoshi's invasion, with the sovereign substantially disengaged from ordinary government throughout. An order in which the apex can be effectively absent for two decades without the order failing is an order that is not being held up by the apex. It is being held up by the belief installed in a few hundred thousand degree-holders and the several million households whose elders enforced the rules on their own kin, and by the sheer momentum of an administrative routine that a magistrate in Fujian could run without any instruction arriving from anywhere.

This is what it means to say that a conquest has fully taken, and there is no better demonstration of it anywhere in this collection. It is also, and this is the harder half, the beginning of the explanation for what happened next. A machine that runs without a driver cannot be driven. The same properties that let the Ming state coast for twenty years — quota-based revenue, self-executing local administration, a moral rather than technical formation for its officials, an apex insulated by ritual from ordinary decision — meant that when a set of shocks arrived that required the whole apparatus to be re-aimed at once, there was no lever anywhere in the building connected to enough of it.

What the quota could not do

The shocks arrived from four directions between about 1618 and 1644 and they compounded.

The revenue was rigid by design. The Hongwu emperor had fixed land-tax quotas district by district in the 1370s and 1390s and had declared newly reclaimed northern land untaxed in perpetuity, and although the quotas were adjusted from time to time the principle of a fixed assessment survived, so that a state whose population had perhaps tripled was still collecting on something close to the old base. The Single Whip reforms of the sixteenth century consolidated the tangle of levies and shifted payment into silver, which made the fiscal system efficient and simultaneously hostage to a metal China largely did not mine, arriving from Japan and, via Manila, from the New World. When war with the Jurchen began in earnest the court could not raise the base and so raised surcharges on top of it: the Liao levy from 1618, increased three times by 1620 to nine *li* of silver per *mu*, raised again to twelve *li* in 1630, followed in the Chongzhen reign by two further military surtaxes. The sums involved dwarfed the ordinary revenue. The burden fell hardest where the harvest was failing.

Because the harvest was failing. The 1620s and 1630s in north China were among the coldest and driest decades of the period, and Shaanxi and the northwest suffered repeated crop failure; a great epidemic entering from the northwest in 1641 devastated the densely settled belt along the Grand Canal, and one northern Zhejiang gazetteer records more than half the local population falling ill in a single year. Against that, a state that had cut its own budgets: among the economies of the Chongzhen reign was a retrenchment of the postal relay stations, urged in a memorial by the official Liu Mao. The traditional account, which modern scholars treat with due caution as to its details, holds that among the men thrown out of work by that economy was a relay-station employee from Mizhi county in Shaanxi named Li Zicheng. He joined the frontier army, took part in a mutiny over unpaid wages in 1629, and went to the rebels.

And the army that was supposed to deal with all of this was the wreck of a device the Ming had built at their own founding and watched fail. The *weisuo* system had enrolled hereditary military households — the son bound to replace the father — into guards and battalions supported by their own military colonies, so that in principle the empire kept a very large standing force at no cost to the treasury; early Ming figures of well over two

million men are cited. By the sixteenth century the colony lands had been encroached upon, the households impoverished, and desertion so general that contemporary statistics record rates of fifty and even eighty to ninety per cent, with authorised capital-garrison posts filled at well under half strength. The state's answer had been to hire: paid professional soldiers, *mubing*, in the hundreds of thousands and eventually over a million, which solved the fighting problem and destroyed the fiscal one, since paid armies must be paid and the quota would not stretch.

Hold that last fact still for a moment, because it is the most useful thing in this landscape for what follows. The country the Manchus were about to enter had already run a hereditary, self-supporting, closed military caste for two and a half centuries; had watched it decay from an army into a registration category; and had documented the decay in its own archives, in memorials any literate official could consult. The Qing were about to install a hereditary military caste of their own — and to remove even the self-supporting part of the arrangement, paying it in stipends instead of land it worked. Whether that was ignorance or preference is a question the modules will have to answer, but the option of knowing better was on the shelf.

A people assembled inside sixty years

Now the other side of the wall, and the first thing to say is that there was not, in 1583, anything that could be called a Manchu people.

There were Jurchen: forest-and-river peoples of the northeast, farming, hunting, trading sable and ginseng and horses at the Ming frontier markets, organised in clans and fortified settlements, divided into groupings the Chinese called Jianzhou, Haixi and the 'wild' Jurchen, and thoroughly penetrated by Ming power. The Ming ran the northeast through a system of commissions and patents: chieftains were given Chinese military titles, trade licences and gifts, and were played against one another as a matter of settled policy. Nurhaci's grandfather Giocangga and his father Taksi both held such patents, and both were killed in 1583 during a Ming operation against a rival fort — the Ming called it an accident, refused to hand over the Jurchen chieftain responsible, and compensated the son with gifts and investiture.

That son spent the next three decades doing to the Jurchen what the Ming had been doing to them. He subdued the Hada by 1603, the Hoifa in 1607, the wild Jurchen by 1611, absorbed the Ula in 1613, and finished with the Yehe. Throughout most of it he

was a Ming vassal in good standing, holding the Ming title of Dragon-Tiger General and sending tribute embassies to Beijing — the last of them in 1615, the very year he completed the eight banners. This is a fact the Qing would later find so uncomfortable that the Yongzheng emperor attempted to argue his ancestors had never been anyone's subjects, and the compilers of the official *History of the Ming* declined to use the Ming Veritable Records as a source for the Jurchen sections at all. The founder of the dynasty had been a client of the dynasty he destroyed, and his descendants spent real effort trying to get that out of the record.

Meanwhile he built the instruments. In 1599 he ordered two of his men, Erdeni and G'ag'ai, to adapt the Mongolian script to the Jurchen tongue, over their objections that it could not be done; the result was the script 'without dots and circles', serviceable and ambiguous, and it was only in 1632 that the scholar Dahai added the diacritics and the extra letters for Chinese sounds that produced the mature Manchu writing system. A people acquired a written language within one lifetime, and acquired it for administrative reasons: Nurhaci's stated complaint was that his own documents had to be kept by Mongol scribes.

The other instrument was the banner. The Jurchen hunting party had used a unit called the *niru* — the word means arrow — under a designated leader. From about 1601, as his following grew beyond what clan structures could carry, Nurhaci reorganised it: three hundred households to a company, five companies to a *jalan*, five *jalan* to a *gūsa* or banner, with four banners distinguished by plain yellow, white, red and blue. (Some accounts date the first four banners to 1591; the sources differ and the range should stand.) By 1614 there were perhaps four hundred companies; in 1615 the four banners were doubled by the creation of bordered versions of each. The device's importance is not that it produced good cavalry, though it did. It is that some companies deliberately cut across existing clan and tribal membership, so that a man's primary institutional identity became his banner rather than his lineage — and that the banner was simultaneously the army, the census, the tax unit, the land-allocation authority and the court of first instance. Every household was in one. There was no civilian population.

That is a conquest caste being manufactured to specification, in the open, within about fifteen years, by a man who had watched the Ming do the same thing badly. And because the banner was the whole society rather than a branch of it, the newcomers who were added went in on the same terms: Mongol companies from the late 1620s and a separate Mongol Eight Banners in the mid-1630s; Han Chinese defectors and captives

from Liaodong assembled first into an artillery corps in 1631, then into two banners in 1637, four in 1639, and a full Han Chinese Eight Banners in 1642 after the surrender at Song-Jin. By 1644 roughly a quarter of the companies coming through the pass were Chinese.

The Han were there from the beginning, and they were there by defection. In 1618 Nurhaci published the Seven Grievances — a manifesto of injuries suffered at Ming hands, opening with the killing of his father and grandfather without cause and dwelling heavily on Ming favouritism toward the rival Yehe — and immediately took Fushun. The commander at Fushun, Li Yongfang, surrendered the city, was made a commander in the Jin army and was married to a granddaughter of Nurhaci. He was the first of a very long series. The following spring at Sarhu a Ming army several times the size of Nurhaci's was destroyed piecemeal, and over the next four years Liaoyang, Shenyang and Guangning fell; a Chinese-populated province passed under Jurchen rule two decades before the conquest proper, giving the new state a population of farmers, artisans, gunners and clerks, and giving it also its first experience of governing Han subjects — an experience that went badly. Nurhaci sorted the Liaodong Chinese by how much grain they held, and after a Han revolt in 1623 turned to killing and to explicitly discriminatory measures.

The state built before the country

His son changed that, and in changing it built the thing that made 1644 possible.

Hong Taiji took the khanship in 1626 and spent seventeen years constructing, at Mukden, a working model of a Chinese state before he had any of China. He reversed his father's policy toward the literati and in 1629 held an examination that selected some two hundred Manchu, Mongol and Han students; he created a Literary Office staffed by scholars of all three peoples in the same year, reorganised in 1636 into three inner academies; he had the Chinese classics translated into Manchu; from 1634 he ran examinations for bannermen in their own languages. In 1631, on the advice of the Han official Ning Wanwo, he established the Six Boards — Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Punishments, Works — on the Ming pattern, each headed not by one president but by four: two Manchus, one Mongol, one Chinese. In 1632 he ended the collegial rule of the senior princes and established that he alone sat facing south.

Then he renamed everything. On 12 November 1635 he proclaimed that his people were to be called *Manju* and that the older designations, Jurchen among them, were not to be used — a name change that dissolved the old tribal distinctions into a single new category and shed the association with the defeated Jin of the twelfth century. In 1636 he abandoned the state name his father had chosen, Later Jin, took the title of emperor and declared the Great Qing. He also, that year, established a censorate, and in 1638 a ministry for Mongol affairs.

The significance of all this for what follows can hardly be overstated and is easy to miss because it happened offstage. The dyarchy of Manchu and Han officials that would run the Qing central government for two and a half centuries was not improvised in Beijing after the conquest. It was designed and staffed at Mukden thirteen years before, in a frontier capital, by a khan whose realm at the time was a fraction of one Chinese province. The examinations that would recruit the Han elite were being run for bannermen before the conquest. The claim to Heaven's mandate was made before there was anything to claim it over.

Hong Taiji died on 21 September 1643, aged fifty, without having designated an heir and without having taken China. The senior princes settled the succession by compromise on his five-year-old ninth son, who reigned as the Shunzhi emperor with Nurhaci's fourteenth son Dorgon as regent — the same Dorgon whose mother had been forced to follow Nurhaci in death seventeen years earlier, in a succession settlement that had gone the other way.

The eve

So the two orders stand as follows in the early spring of 1644.

South and west of the wall, a civilisation of perhaps a hundred and fifty to two hundred million people, administered by fewer than fourteen hundred county magistrates and held together mainly by lineages, gentry and habit; possessed of the deepest continuous bureaucratic tradition on earth and of a doctrine of legitimacy that had already, in writing, conceded that conquerors from the north could hold Heaven's mandate; with a revenue frozen at fourteenth-century quotas and a burden of war surcharges laid on top of it; with a hereditary army that had decayed into a registry and a paid army it could not pay; with the northwest in famine and rebellion, and with rebel armies under Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong holding provinces. In April the capital

would fall to a former relay-station employee and the last Ming emperor would hang himself on the hill behind the palace.

North and east of it, a state twenty-eight years old, ruling a people whose name was eight years old, writing in a script whose current form was twelve years old, organised entirely into hereditary companies of three hundred households, governed through Six Boards copied from the enemy and staffed by quota across three ethnicities, commanded by a regent acting for a five-year-old, and mustering something between a hundred and ten and a hundred and fifty thousand men — a quarter of them Chinese who had come over, some of them a generation earlier.

The two would meet at the Shanhai Pass in May, and they would meet because a Ming general there decided which of two enemies he preferred. But that belongs to the account of the floor of force, not to this one.

What this landscape is for is to make sure the reader has the shape before the events start. The Manchus did not defeat a civilisation. They were the last and best-prepared of a long series of northern peoples to take over an apparatus that had been designed, refined and repeatedly proven to be takeable, whose legitimating doctrine specified in advance the conditions under which a takeover would be lawful, and whose own founding dynasty had put those conditions in writing while marching against the previous conquerors. What they brought that was genuinely their own was not an idea and not an administration. It was a caste — hereditary, closed, recently manufactured, and about to be laid on top of a merit ladder they had no intention of shutting.

Reading the eve against the framework

Four things come out of this ground, three of them refinements and one a prediction the modules exist to break.

A legitimating doctrine can contain its own transfer clause, and where it does, the conqueror's robe costs him nothing. The framework already holds that legitimacy is always borrowed from a specific audience's own currency and never minted. This case supplies the extreme instance and sharpens the finding. The Mandate of Heaven is not merely borrowable; it is written to be transferred. It states that the mandate is not constant, that Heaven helps only the virtuous, that Heaven's judgement is read off the people's condition, and — in a text every examination candidate had by heart — that cutting off a ruler who has forfeited it is not the killing of a sovereign at all. An order

running that doctrine has installed, at the centre of its own justification, a standing offer to whoever wins next. The analytic move is to ask, of any order, whether its robe specifies conditions of forfeiture and who is entitled to read them off; where it does, expect conquest to be cheap in doctrinal terms and expect the conqueror to adopt the existing robe wholesale rather than import one. And expect the bill: the clause does not close behind him. It stays in the canon, in the schools, in the mouths of the men he has hired, available to be read against his own house — which makes this the one item on the menu that a conqueror can never take out of circulation, because taking it out would destroy the thing he took.

The recursion runs on devices as well as orders, and here the failure was in the conqueror's own archive. The Mamluk ground established that rulers inherit previously failed answers and reach for them again because the alternatives fail sooner. The Ming case adds a harder version. The Ming had built a hereditary, closed, self-supporting military caste, watched its colonies be encroached upon and its households impoverished, recorded desertion rates of fifty to ninety per cent in its own statistics, and been driven to replace it with paid troops it could not afford — the whole cycle documented in the memorial literature of a state whose records the Qing were about to inherit intact. The Qing then installed a hereditary caste of their own with the self-supporting element removed. So the framework should not expect a conqueror to learn from the conquered order's failures merely because the evidence is in the building; the question to ask is what the *other* columns of his ledger looked like at the moment of choosing, and in particular whether the device was doing a job — holding a newly assembled people together as a people — that no more efficient arrangement could have done.

Where the conquered order is maximally office-bearing, what the conqueror wants is a payroll and a register, not land. The card already holds that the operative question is whether the prior order vested power in offices a stranger can enter rather than in bloodlines. Late Ming China is the limiting case: not merely offices, but an institution that *manufactured* the men to fill them, at their own expense, with a curriculum that formed them into believers before it certified them as competent. The plain statement is stronger than any image here. Nurhaci and Hong Taiji did not have to ask whom they would have to deal with in order to get paid, because the answer was written down — a county magistrate, a prefect, a provincial treasurer, a board president, each in a numbered post with a stated salary and a stated jurisdiction — and the men currently in those posts were replaceable from a pool the conquered society would go on

producing whether or not anybody conquered it. This is why the whole apparatus was captured rather than rebuilt, and why the Qing spent seventeen years before the conquest building a working scale model of it at Mukden. Note the sequence, because it is unusual and worth carrying forward: **the copy preceded the capture.** A conqueror who builds the conquered order's institutions in his own capital before he takes theirs is telling you, in the plainest available way, exactly what he intends to do with them.

And the refinement this landscape actually contributes: the self-running order is cheap and unsteerable, and both come out of the same account. The collection has treated the gradient from an order held by force to one that runs on the governed's own conviction as running from expensive to cheap, and it does. What the Wanli reign shows is the price on the far end. An emperor withdrew from the business of government for roughly two decades and the empire assessed its taxes, held its examinations, rotated its magistrates and fought a foreign war. That is the strongest single demonstration in this corpus of what a fully naturalised order can do without anyone driving it. It is also the reason that when a compound shock arrived — a frozen revenue meeting a doubled population meeting a cooling climate meeting a war on the frontier meeting an army that had ceased to exist — there was no mechanism anywhere in the structure capable of re-aiming the whole thing at once, because a system built to run without instruction is a system with nowhere to put an instruction. The apex had been ritualised into redundancy; the local administration was performed by men the state did not pay and could not redeploy; the fiscal base was a quota fixed by a founder three centuries dead and defended by every interest that benefited from its being fixed. So: **an order approaching the self-running pole trades adaptability for cheapness, and the trade is not visible until the shock arrives, because in ordinary years the two are indistinguishable from good government.** Where a study finds an order running on very little coercion and very little supervision, it should go looking for the steering mechanism, and it should record its absence as a finding rather than as an absence of findings.

The prediction. This study begins with two recruitment criteria about to be operated by the same state at the same time: a banner caste no Han could ever enter, and an examination ladder carrying Han men to the highest civil offices in the empire. The Mamluk case concluded that an order recruiting its elite by an unearnable criterion will educate its subjects generously, because the schoolroom cannot be the door; an order recruiting by merit must ration education, because there the schoolroom is the door. The Qing are about to run both criteria at once, in one government, over one population, for

two hundred and sixty-eight years. If that finding holds, two distinct logics should be visible operating side by side, and the boundary between them should be findable in the evidence — in who is educated and how generously, in where the surveillance falls, in what the factional residue accumulates on each side of the line, and in which of the two ladders the state grows anxious about. And there is a distinction the whole study will turn on and which must not be blurred: the examination admitted a man to *office*. It never admitted him to the *caste*. Those are two doors, and working out precisely which one was open, to whom, and on what terms, is most of what the next twelve modules are for.

A note on sources. The exact primary quotations in this landscape are three, and all are given in the original because the wording is the evidence. The 1367 *Proclamation to the Central Plain* (諭中原檄) is quoted from the text preserved in the Veritable Records of the Ming as reproduced by *China Heritage*; the English renderings above are my own, made against that Chinese text, and F.W. Mote's published translation of the same passages was consulted but is not reproduced. The proclamation's traditional ascription to Song Lian is doubted — his own chronology places him in mourning at Jinhua in 1367 and the piece appears in no early edition of his collected works, entering the corpus only in a 1911 compilation — and it should be cited as an official Ming document of contested authorship rather than as Song Lian's. Editions differ between 驅逐胡虜 and 驅除胡虜 in the famous clause. The Hongwu Six Maxims are quoted from the *Placard of People's Instructions* (教民榜文) of 1398; the transmitted text varies between 尊敬長上 and 恭敬長上 and between 毋作非為 and 無作非為, and the English is again my own. The Mencius passage is given in James Legge's translation, which is out of copyright, from *Mencius* I.B.8; the *Book of Poetry* line 天命靡常 is from ode 235 (*Wen Wang*) and the *Book of Documents* lines cited are from the *Cai Zhong zhi ming* and *Tai shi* chapters, all in Legge's renderings or close to them. Everything else here is paraphrase from modern scholarship and is credited in the text where it carries weight: Ho Ping-ti on *jinshi* social origins and on population; Benjamin Elman on the civil examinations and on the language of fate; G. William Skinner for the count of county-level units by dynasty; David Faure on lineage and the Great Rites Controversy; Ray Huang on the Wanli court; Mark Elliott on banner demography and on the Manchu identity question. Figures are given as ranges wherever the record is contested, and several are load-bearing enough to name the dispute: late Ming population (roughly 150–200 million by modern estimate against official registrations of 51–62 million, with the multiplier itself disputed in the demographic literature); total Qing forces at the 1644 entry (roughly 110,000–

150,000, against a nominal company count of 583 complete and 28 incomplete companies which is itself a standard reference figure rather than a muster roll); early Ming military establishment (over 2.7 million on paper, with late-Ming desertion rates of 50–90 per cent reported in period statistics of unknown reliability); and the founding date of the first four banners (1601 in most accounts, 1591 in some). The story that Li Zicheng lost his livelihood in the Chongzhen postal retrenchment is traditional and is treated here as such: the retrenchment and Liu Mao's memorial are documented, Li's employment in the relay service is well attested, and the causal link between the two is a commonplace of the sources that modern scholarship does not uniformly endorse. Two further cautions belong here rather than in the prose. First, the Manchu identity question is a live scholarly dispute — the older thesis that the Manchus were progressively sinicised has been contested for some thirty years by work arguing that the dynasty maintained a deliberate and distinct Manchu identity and ruled a multi-ethnic empire in several idioms at once — and this landscape has tried to describe the assembly of that identity without adopting either side of the argument about what became of it. Second, no Manchu-language primary text is quoted anywhere above, and none should be until it has been verified against an edition or a scholarly translation reproducing it; the *Jiu Manzhou dang* and the Manchu Veritable Records are named here as research targets for the modules that follow.

MODULE 1

THE WHITE CLOTH ON THEIR BACKS

Module 1 · The floor of force — how a hundred thousand men entered an empire of two hundred million by invitation, took thirty-nine years to finish what they had started, and built the floor that held it out of the people they had conquered

The letter that went to the wrong man

On 5 March 1644, Dorgon wrote a friendly letter to Li Zicheng. In it the Qing prince-regent proposed that the two of them devise a plan in common and unite their forces against the Ming.

Nothing came of it, because within seven weeks Li Zicheng had taken Beijing on his own and the offer was moot. But the letter is the right place to begin, because it disposes of the version of these events in which a dynasty with a destiny descends on a fallen civilisation to restore order. Eleven weeks before the Qing entered China as the avengers of the Ming imperial house, the man who led them in was writing to the bandit chief who would destroy that house, proposing a joint operation. What Dorgon wanted in March 1644 was the north, or a share of it, on whatever terms were going. What he got in June was the whole country, and the story about why he had come was written afterwards to fit.

This module reconstructs the floor of force on which the Qing order stood: who actually held organised violence at the founding, by what acts the order was established, what its founding legend claimed, and what that legend covers. The short answer, which the rest of the module is an attempt to substantiate, is that the founding was not a conquest in the ordinary sense at all. It was an intervention in someone else's civil war, conducted at the invitation of one of the parties, on terms the invited party rewrote in the week of the battle; that it took thirty-nine years to complete; and that within eighteen months of the decisive engagement the great majority of the men enforcing Qing rule on the ground were Chinese soldiers who had changed sides.

Six weeks

The chronology is worth having exactly, because the popular version compresses it into a single act and the compression hides the mechanism.

On 5 April 1644 the Chongzhen emperor, watching Li Zicheng's armies move through Shanxi, issued a general call for the immediate help of any military commandant in the empire. On 6 April he ordered Wu Sangui to abandon the fortified city of Ningyuan, north of the Great Wall, and bring his army back to Shanhai Pass, from which it could cover the capital — a movement by boat that would take ten days, and which handed the Qing every foot of territory outside the wall. On 11 April, in a bid to secure the loyalty of the men he was now entirely dependent on, the emperor made four generals earls, Wu Sangui among them.

On 21 April, one of those newly created earls, Tang Tong, surrendered the Juyong Pass to Li Zicheng without a fight. On 22 April Li took Changping on the northern outskirts of the capital and burned some of the Ming imperial tombs. On 23 April his army reached the western suburbs and began attacking the walls, though he held back from a full assault in the hope that the emperor would come to terms. On 24 April a eunuch opened one of the gates. On 25 April the Chongzhen emperor hanged himself on the hill behind the Forbidden City, having first struck the bell that summoned his ministers to council and waited for men who did not come.

On 26 April Wu Sangui, halfway to the capital, learned that the capital had fallen, and turned back to fortify the pass. He was now a general with an intact field army, no sovereign, and two enemies. Li Zicheng, needing the pass, sent Tang Tong against him on 3 May and Wu routed him on the 5th; a second attempt on the 10th failed likewise. On 18 May Li came himself, with an army given as sixty thousand men by Frederic Wakeman and as more than a hundred thousand by Frederick Mote.

Meanwhile the news had reached Mukden. On 13 May Dorgon's Chinese grand secretary Fan Wencheng argued that Li Zicheng's mistreatment of the Beijing population and the former Ming officials had created the opening; he and Hong Chengchou — himself a captured Ming supreme commander who had gone over in 1642 — urged the prince to present the Qing as avengers of the Ming and to claim the Mandate of Heaven. On 14 May the Qing Grand Army marched out of Mukden.

On 20 May two of Wu Sangui's lieutenants reached Dorgon's camp at the Liao River carrying a letter. What the letter asked for was help in defeating the bandits and restoring the Ming dynasty, in return for great profits — 大利. It was a request for an ally, from a Ming general to a foreign power, on behalf of a dynasty he intended to put back on the throne. Later that same day the Manchus learned for the first time that the Chongzhen emperor was dead, and Dorgon wrote back declining the terms offered and substituting his own: help against Li Zicheng in exchange for Wu's surrender to the Qing. Also on 20 May, as a result of planning laid earlier, small parties of Qing troops began crossing the wall to post written proclamations announcing that the Qing would harm nobody and would kill only Li Zicheng's bandits.

On 25 May Wu accepted. He had no other move; Li's army was already camped a few kilometres west of the pass. Dorgon put his troops on a forced march, covering something over a hundred and fifty kilometres, running down and destroying a detachment under Tang Tong on the way, and halting eight kilometres short of the pass at dusk on the 26th to sleep in armour until midnight.

At dawn on 27 May the Qing army reached the gates and Dorgon received Wu Sangui's formal surrender.

The white cloth

Then comes the detail that tells you what kind of war this was.

Before the fighting began, Wu Sangui had his men tie pieces of white cloth to their backs, so that the Qing could tell them apart from the Shun rebels.

Consider what has to be true for that to be necessary. Two armies were about to fight at the eastern end of the Great Wall for possession of the Chinese empire. Both were Chinese. They wore the same clothes, spoke the same language, carried much the same equipment, and had in many cases served in the same Ming establishment within the previous two years — Tang Tong, who had been made an earl alongside Wu in April, was fighting for Li in May. The Manchus could not distinguish their allies from their enemies by sight, and the solution improvised on the morning of the battle was a rag.

Nor did the Manchus do most of the fighting. Wu's troops were placed in the vanguard and ordered to charge; the Shun line held; Wu's men took heavy casualties and by the late afternoon, on Wakeman's reconstruction, were close to breaking, when a

violent sandstorm came up. Dorgon chose that moment, took his cavalry around Wu's right flank and struck Li's left. What broke the Shun army was the sight of mounted men with shaved foreheads coming out of the dust — an army that had been fighting other Chinese all afternoon suddenly discovering that the Manchus were in the field. The rout was total and thousands were cut down in the retreat toward Yongping.

So the decisive engagement of the Qing conquest was fought principally between two Chinese armies, decided by a Manchu cavalry reserve committed at the end of the day, and turned in part on the fact that the Manchus were visually unmistakable and the Chinese were not.

The next day Dorgon raised Wu Sangui from earl to prince, and Wu's surviving troops shaved their heads and joined the Qing forces. The white cloth had lasted one afternoon. What replaced it was permanent, and it was on the head.

Avengers

Li Zicheng fell back on Beijing, reached it on 31 May, let his men loot the government offices, had himself formally declared emperor of the Great Shun on 3 June in a final gesture, set the palace complex alight on the 4th and left, having held the capital for six weeks. The population killed those of his stragglers they could catch.

On 5 June the elders and officials of Beijing went out of the city to welcome their liberators, expecting Wu Sangui and a restored Ming heir apparent, and found instead a Manchu prince with the front of his head shaved presenting himself as regent for a six-year-old. Dorgon installed himself in the Wuying Palace, one of the few buildings Li had left standing. His banner troops were ordered not to loot, and did not, and the discipline of that first fortnight did a great deal of work: the transition, in Wakeman's phrase, was remarkably smooth.

The legend was assembled at once and it is a very carefully built thing. The Qing had not overthrown the Ming; a bandit had. The Qing had come to punish the bandit and to avenge a murdered emperor. Accordingly the Chongzhen emperor was given imperial burial in the Ming tombs and, in time, a posthumous name from his supposed avengers; officials who submitted were confirmed in their posts; the examinations were restored; the Ming administrative structure was left standing. The claim was not that the mandate had been taken from the Ming by force of Manchu arms. It was that the mandate had already been lost, that Li Zicheng had held it for six weeks and forfeited it by burning the

capital, and that the Qing had picked it up off the ground where the Ming's own subject had dropped it. On 30 October the six-year-old Shunzhi emperor sacrificed at the Altar of Heaven, and on 8 November he was formally enthroned as emperor of China.

Set beside that, from the same weeks and the same man, the order that every claimant to the Ming throne, including the last emperor's own descendants, was to be executed along with his supporters.

Both are true at once and neither cancels the other. The mourning was real and so was the standing order to kill the heirs, and the second is the more informative because it tells you what the first was for. A dynasty that had genuinely come to restore the Ming would have had a Ming prince to restore; there was one available within weeks, proclaimed at Nanjing on 19 June as the Hongguang emperor. What the legend needed was not a living Ming but a dead one — a martyr whose death could be laid at the rebels' door and avenged by strangers, and no surviving claimant to complicate the arithmetic. The proclamations posted north of the wall on 20 May had said the Qing would kill only Li Zicheng's bandits. The category turned out to be elastic.

This particular shape of founding legend is not a detail and it will run through the whole study. Because the Qing built their legitimacy on an account of *who had ended the Ming*, the historical record itself became a strategic asset in a way it is not for a conqueror who simply says he won. A dynasty that claims to have defeated its predecessor can afford historians. A dynasty that claims not to have fought its predecessor at all cannot, and the reader should expect this order to police history with a thoroughness it never applies to doctrine.

The measurement of June 1644

Two days after entering the city, on 7 June, Dorgon issued proclamations to the officials around the capital: local populations that shaved the forehead, wore the queue and submitted would have their officials confirmed in office. It was the whole settlement in one sentence — keep your post, keep your rank, change your head.

About three weeks later he withdrew it. The order had provoked risings in the districts around Beijing and the Qing could not hold the countryside and enforce it at the same time, so they stopped enforcing it.

Then, on 21 July 1645, after Nanjing had fallen and the first Southern Ming court had collapsed, it was issued again — this time with a ten-day deadline and death for non-compliance, enforced by soldiers moving through the cities with barbers, and remembered in the slogan 留頭不留髮，留髮不留頭: keep your head and you do not keep your hair; keep your hair and you do not keep your head.

The thirteen months between those two dates are the most precise instrument in this module. The same order, issued by the same man, over much the same population, was unenforceable in June 1644 and enforceable in July 1645, and nothing had changed except how much force the Qing could put behind it and how little was left to run to. An order that a regime *withdraws* is worth more to the analyst than one it enforces, because enforcement can be theatre and retraction never is. Nobody retracts an edict to make a point. The retraction of June 1644 is the Qing state's own measurement of its floor, taken by the only people in a position to measure it accurately, and it says: not yet.

The reissue also tells you what the queue was for. If it had been a religious or cultural requirement it would have been pressed in 1644 regardless of cost, as such things generally are. It was pressed when it became affordable, and it was pressed hardest in the region that had just stopped resisting. It is a loyalty test with a visible result, imposed at the moment the state acquired the capacity to check every man's head — and what it does above all is solve the problem the white cloth solved for one afternoon. After July 1645 a Chinese man's allegiance was legible at a hundred paces and could not be changed back in less than several years' hair growth. That is the founding act of surveillance in this order and it is written on the body, which is where the account of the robe will have to take it up, because the same act is simultaneously that robe's most conspicuous seam.

Thirty-nine years

The conquest was not finished in 1644 and was not finished in 1645. It was finished, if the word is allowed at all, in 1683.

Li Zicheng was driven from Xi'an in February 1645 and killed that September, either by his own hand or by a village self-defence band. But the Southern Ming courts succeeded one another for eighteen years: the Hongguang emperor at Nanjing from June 1644 to June 1645; the Longwu emperor in Fujian; and finally the Yongli emperor, who held out in the southwest and in Burma until 1662, when he was handed over and executed — by Wu Sangui, the general whose surrender at the pass had begun the

business eighteen years earlier, and who thereby closed the Ming imperial line with his own hands.

The pacification of the Yangtze delta in 1645 is where the floor becomes visible without any interpretation at all. Yangzhou, defended by Shi Kefa, fell on 20 May 1645 after a siege that cost the attackers heavily, and Prince Dodo turned his troops loose on the city. Wang Xiuchu, who survived it, wrote *A Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou*, one of the very few sustained eyewitness accounts of a seventeenth-century massacre written from inside it, and his figure of more than eight hundred thousand dead has been rejected by modern scholarship as an impossibility for a city of that size — the diary itself shows the killing over by the sixth day. What is not in dispute is the intent, which Dodo stated: the city was to be made an example, and the example was aimed at everyone downriver. Jiangyin then held out against a Qing siege for about eighty days over the summer of 1645, specifically over the queue order, and was destroyed when the walls were breached in the autumn; the death figures given in the traditional accounts run into the tens of thousands and should be treated with the same caution as Yangzhou's. Jiading rose over the same issue and was put down more than once. The accounts of all three were reprinted by anti-Qing propagandists two and a half centuries later in the run-up to 1911, which is a fact about the sources as well as about the events.

Then the sea, where the floor did not reach. Zheng Chenggong — Koxinga — ran a maritime power off the Fujian coast that the Qing had no navy to fight, and after his failed attempt on Nanjing in 1659 the court took the only measure available to a land army against a sea power: it removed the sea's hinterland. The Great Clearance, ordered in 1661 and extended by further edicts in 1664 and 1679, required the population of the coastal strip from Shandong down through Jiangnan, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong to move thirty to fifty *li* — roughly fifteen to twenty-five kilometres — inland, with the abandoned zone marked by boundary works, houses burned, boats broken and the ground left empty. It was maintained for about twenty years and lifted only after Taiwan fell in 1683. The state could not reach Koxinga, so it depopulated a coastline to starve him, and the people it moved were its own subjects.

And in 1673 the men who had conquered the south for the Qing rose against it. Wu Sangui in Yunnan and two other Chinese generals who had been given the south to hold as feudatories revolted when the court moved to recall them; the war lasted until 1681 and at its worst the Qing held little south of the Yangtze. Wu died in 1678 having proclaimed a dynasty of his own. Two years after the last of the feudatories was crushed,

the Zheng regime on Taiwan surrendered and the conquest that had begun with an invitation at a mountain pass in May 1644 was over.

Thirty-nine years. It is worth saying plainly what that number means for the framework, because a conquest completed in a season and a conquest completed in four decades are different objects even when the maps end up the same colour. Nothing about the Qing hold on China was settled by the events of 1644. What 1644 settled was who would be operating the apparatus while the question was decided.

The floor was made of the conquered

Which brings us to the arithmetic that this module exists to state.

At the entry into the pass the whole banner establishment — Manchu, Mongol and Chinese companies together — stood at something like a hundred thousand effective soldiers, or between a hundred and ten and a hundred and fifty thousand men if the bondservants, auxiliaries and non-banner allies are counted in. That was the entire coercive capital of the Qing state, and it was expected to hold a country of perhaps a hundred and fifty to two hundred million people across an area the size of Europe, while simultaneously fighting the Shun remnants, the Daxi armies in Sichuan, three successive Ming courts, and eventually a maritime power.

It could not be done, and the Qing did not try. Almost immediately they began enrolling the surrendered Ming armies into a wholly separate force under green standards — the Lüying, the Green Standard Army — organised on the Ming battalion pattern, equipped and drilled in the Ming manner, officered by a mixture of Chinese and bannermen, and paid by the state. Its size fluctuated but before the mid-nineteenth century it stood at something between half a million and six hundred and sixty thousand men, three to four times the banner establishment. And its function was not to be a reserve. It was the Green Standard that did the routine military governing of the provinces, garrison by garrison, in the towns and the countryside; the banner forces were concentrated in walled quarters inside a limited number of strategic cities and brought out when sustained resistance appeared.

State that without the vocabulary of the framework and it is still startling. Within roughly a year of the conquest, the men who stood between the Qing dynasty and the Chinese population, in most places, on most days, for the next two centuries, were Chinese. The conquest caste was a strategic reserve behind them. This is not a late

development or a symptom of decay; it is how the order was built, from the first campaigning season, because the numbers permitted nothing else.

Two consequences follow immediately and both matter later.

The first is that the Qing floor was a paid floor. The banners were maintained on hereditary stipends and the Green Standard on wages, and neither was self-supporting in the way the Ming *weisuo* colonies had been meant to be. An order whose entire coercive apparatus draws salary is an order whose grip on the country is a line item, and it will be worth watching, when the extraction module comes, what happens to that line when the revenue does not grow.

The second is the bill that came in 1673. The southwest had been given to Chinese generals to hold, with their own armies and their own revenues, in exchange for holding it — which is a grant purchasing armed service rather than mere compliance, and the framework's expectation for such grants is a revolt, dated. Here the date is 1673 and the revolt very nearly succeeded. Note what the Qing did afterwards: the feudatories were abolished, the Green Standard was reorganised so that its provincial commands answered upward through separate channels, and the Chinese and Mongol elements were progressively transferred out of the banners over the following century. The order learned the lesson the hard way and spent the next two hundred years arranging that no single Chinese officer would ever again hold an army and a province together.

Why nobody could simply leave

One question the framework asks at every founding is what made the governed capturable — what geography, what fortress system, what register, what law made dispersal impossible. In this case the honest answer is that the Qing did not have to arrange it, because the Ming had.

The Chinese peasant of 1650 was inside a system of registered households and assessed land that had been maintained, however imperfectly, for two and a half centuries; his village sat inside a county with a walled seat, connected by a grain-tribute network to a capital; his lineage held ancestral graves and a hall he could not take with him and would not abandon; his neighbours were collectively liable for his tax. The country was enormous and there were genuinely places to go — the mountains, the southwest, the water world of the delta, the frontier — and the seventeenth century saw a great many people go to them. But going meant leaving the registers, and leaving the

registers meant leaving the land title, the lineage, the market and the graves. The trap was not a wall. It was a filing system attached to an ancestral hall, and the Qing inherited it intact and in working order along with everything else.

The exception proves the point exactly. Where the inherited system genuinely did not reach — out to sea, where a man with a boat was beyond any register — the Qing had to manufacture capturability from nothing, and the only method available to them was to destroy the coast and move everybody on it inland behind a line of markers. The Great Clearance is what a floor of force looks like when it has to be built rather than inherited, and it cost twenty years and an unknown but very large number of lives to hold a coastline that the Ming registers had never really held either.

Reading the founding against the framework

Four things come out of this founding, and one of them requires the seed's central hypothesis to be revised before the study has properly begun.

The defection at the founding is not an event; it is an institution, and it was built six years before it was used. The prediction carried into this study was that the Qing entered through a defection — a Ming general opening a pass — and that finding the collapse-end mechanism at a founding would be a contribution. The first half holds and is if anything stronger than expected: Wu Sangui asked for an ally to help him restore the Ming, and Dorgon replied by changing the terms to surrender, and Wu accepted because the alternative was destruction that week. But the second half needs correcting, because Wu Sangui was not the first and the Qing had not improvised the arrangement for him. Li Yongfang surrendered Fushun in 1618, in the opening battle of the whole war, and was made a Jin commander and married to Nurhaci's granddaughter. Zu Dashou surrendered at Jinzhou in 1642; Hong Chengchou, captured the same year, was in Dorgon's council in 1644 urging the invasion of his own country. And the Han Chinese banners, completed as eight full banners in 1642, existed precisely to receive such men and their troops on standing, published terms. **So the refinement is this: where a conqueror builds a standing institution to receive defectors — a rank structure, a marriage policy, a guarantee of position — defection ceases to be a rupture and becomes a recruitment channel with a price list, and the conquest can then be won one commander at a time over decades rather than in a campaign.** The analytic question to ask of any conquest is therefore not *was there a defection* but *were the terms of surrender standardised in advance, and by what institution*. Where they were,

expect the conquered elite's military class to come over in a steady stream and expect the conqueror's own caste to be doing proportionally little of the fighting.

A withdrawn edict measures the floor more precisely than a won battle. The revealed-preference test on this card measures what an apex with uncontested force will nonetheless pay for legitimacy, and reads the payment as proof that some audience required it. This case supplies the coercive mirror of that test. In June 1644 the Qing ordered every Chinese man to shave his head, and about three weeks later they took the order back, because it was producing risings they could not simultaneously suppress. In July 1645, after Nanjing, they issued the identical order with a ten-day deadline and a death penalty, and enforced it. Nothing had changed but capacity. **Where an order issues a maximally intrusive demand, retracts it, and later re-issues it unchanged, the interval between the two dates is a direct measurement of the growth of the floor, and the retraction is the harder datum, because a regime will stage an enforcement but will never stage a surrender.** Look for retractions. They are rarer than proclamations and they are the only self-administered measurement of weakness an order ever produces.

The floor of a conquest order can be composed of the conquered from the first year, and this is a design, not a decay. It is tempting to read the nineteenth-century Qing reliance on Han provincial armies as a late transfer of the floor amounting to a deferred abdication. The evidence at the founding refuses that reading, because there was never a period in which the floor was not mostly Han. The Green Standard Army was built out of surrendered Ming troops within a year of the conquest, reached three to four times the size of the entire banner establishment, and performed the ordinary military administration of the provinces while the banners sat in walled quarters as a reserve. **The finding to carry forward is therefore that the nineteenth-century arrangement is not a new mechanism but the founding arrangement running again with the safety catch removed** — and that the real question at the collapse is not whether the floor changed hands but what had been holding the earlier version in place and when it stopped working. The 1673 revolt is the control case and it is exactly on schedule: a grant that bought armed service left three Chinese generals with retinues, revenues and provinces, and eight years of civil war followed. What the Qing built after 1681 — commands that could not be combined, ethnic transfers out of the banners, provincial armies answering upward on separate channels — is the machinery that kept the founding arrangement safe for a further century and a half, and the modules that follow should track whether that machinery was ever dismantled or simply overwhelmed.

And the legend chose history over doctrine, which will shape everything the order later suppresses. Most conquerors claim victory. The Qing claimed *rescue*: that the Ming had already fallen to a rebel, that the rebel had forfeited what he had seized, and that the Manchus had come to punish him and had found the mandate lying in the road. It is an elegant claim, it cost almost nothing, and it made the dynasty's legitimacy hostage to a particular narration of six weeks in the spring of 1644 — including the parts that did not fit, such as the letter Dorgon wrote to Li Zicheng in March offering to join him, and Nurhaci's tribute missions to Beijing, and the fact that the general at the pass had asked for help restoring the house the Qing replaced. **Where an order's legitimacy rests on an account of the past rather than on a doctrine about the present, expect its information control to be aimed at historians rather than at heretics.** That is a testable prediction, and the account of this order's information control exists to break it.

A note on sources. This module carries one exact quotation in the original and it must be flagged rather than relied on. The slogan 留頭不留髮，留髮不留頭 — keep your head and you do not keep your hair, keep your hair and you do not keep your head — is transmitted in later accounts of the 1645 queue enforcement and is universally reported, but I have not verified it against the wording of any edict; it should be treated as a remembered slogan, not as legal text, and the actual promulgated wording of the *tifa ling* remains a research target for Module 3, which is where the queue properly belongs. The phrase 大利, "great profits", from Wu Sangui's letter of 20 May, and the outline of the correspondence between Wu and Dorgon are taken from Frederic Wakeman's reconstruction in *The Great Enterprise* and are paraphrased here rather than quoted, since I have not seen the Chinese text of the letters. Everything else in this module is paraphrase from modern scholarship, principally Wakeman on the events of 1644–45 and Frederick Mote's *Imperial China, 900–1800* where the two differ; Lynn Struve on the Southern Ming and for the translated survivor accounts in *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm*; and the standard reference literature on the Green Standard Army and the Great Clearance. The day-by-day chronology of March to June 1644 follows Wakeman and Mote and is not controversial in outline, though the Gregorian dates for some acts vary by a day between accounts converting from the lunar calendar, and the fall of the Beijing walls is given as 24 April with the emperor's death on the 25th. Figures are given as ranges because they are contested and several are load-bearing. Li Zicheng's army at Shanhai Pass: sixty thousand on Wakeman's estimate, over a hundred thousand on Mote's, with early Qing sources claiming two hundred thousand and Wakeman arguing that those sources inflate the number to magnify the victory. Wu Sangui's force: forty

thousand regulars on one contemporaneous source, up to eighty thousand on Mote's account of the Ningyuan garrison, with a further twenty to fifty thousand militia depending on the account, so that a total of roughly a hundred thousand is the most that can be said. The banner establishment at the entry: about a hundred thousand soldiers, or a hundred and ten to a hundred and fifty thousand men including auxiliaries and bondservants. The Green Standard: approximately half a million to six hundred and sixty thousand at its full development, three to four times the banners. The Yangzhou death toll of more than eight hundred thousand comes from Wang Xiuchu's eyewitness *Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou* and is rejected by modern scholarship as impossible for a city whose whole prefecture may have held five or six hundred thousand people; no reliable figure exists, the massacre plainly happened, and the honest statement is that the scale cannot be recovered. The same caution applies with more force to the figures traditionally given for Jiangyin, where the siege length is variously reported as about eighty or eighty-three days; I have given no death figure for it because I could not verify one against a source I trust, and an order reportedly issued to the Qing commander there, widely quoted in English, is omitted for the same reason. The Great Clearance distance is given in the sources as thirty to fifty *li*, which is roughly fifteen to twenty-five kilometres; some English accounts render this as thirty to fifty miles, which is an error of conversion and inflates the depopulated zone about threefold.

MODULE 2

FOUR TAELS A ROOM

Module 2 · The settlement — what the conquest caste was actually given, what the conquered elite was allowed to keep, and why the boundary between them was a register rather than a bloodline

What the instrument found

Before asking what the Qing did to Chinese landholding, it is necessary to say what Chinese landholding was, because the answer determines how much work the conqueror had to do and in this case the answer is: almost none.

Land in seventeenth-century China was private, alienable property. It was bought and sold on an active market, mortgaged, divided among heirs, rented to tenants on written terms, and recorded — however imperfectly — in the fish-scale registers that mapped plots and the yellow registers that listed households. A man who owned forty *mu* in Zhejiang owned them in a sense a European lawyer would have recognised immediately: he could sell them to a stranger and the sale would be enforced. There was no collective inalienable patrimony to be dissolved, no lineage right to be converted into a transferable estate, no communal allocation to be individualised. The Ming state had inherited and maintained a machinery for taxing private landowners and it worked well enough that the Qing kept it running without modification.

This is worth pausing on, because it removes an entire category of colonial legal manoeuvre from the case. Conquerors who must answer to a metropole that believes in law generally cannot simply take; they must first change what a thing *is*, so that taking it becomes an ordinary transaction, and the instrument that performs the change is a statute — occupied land declared vacant, granted land declared long-owned, collective land declared partible. The Qing needed none of these, for two reasons. There was no metropole: the Qing court was in Beijing from the autumn of 1644 and answered to nobody. And there was no conversion to perform, because the property they wanted was already property.

So the settlement they built is unusually legible. Nobody had to invent a theory about land. What had to be invented — and this is where the whole ingenuity of the arrangement went — was a theory about *persons*: who was inside the settlement, how one got in, and what being inside entitled a man to. The boundary in this order does not run along a deed. It runs along a roll.

Rope and marker

Beginning in the winter of 1644 the Qing sent out parties to enclose land for the banner establishment. The operation was called *quandi* — literally the roping-off or circling of fields — and it was carried out in three main rounds between 1644 and 1685, concentrated in the metropolitan province around Beijing and the plains to its north and east. The total came to something over 160,000 *qing*, which at a hundred *mu* to the *qing* is upward of sixteen million *mu*.

The enclosed land was distributed in tiers that reproduced the banner hierarchy exactly. The imperial household took estates; the princes took princely estates; officers took officer land; ordinary soldiers received allotments. The estates were not worked by their holders. They were managed by a headman — himself a bondservant — who was answerable for cultivation and for revenue, and the actual cultivators were the Chinese peasants who had been on the land, now converted into tenants or into serfs of the banner estate. The old enclosures carried no tax; land the banners acquired later did.

There was no argument advanced for any of this, and no statute converting anything into anything. Men with rope walked the fields and the fields were banner land. The Chinese occupants were in principle to be compensated with substitute land elsewhere, and schemes for supplying it exist in the record, but the process was slow, the substitute land was worse, and a great many households simply lost what they had. The enclosures were among the most bitterly resented acts of the early Qing in the north, and they were halted permanently in the mid-1680s.

Set the scale honestly, though, because the resentment and the scale are different questions. Sixteen million *mu* is an enormous transfer to visit on the districts that suffered it, and a very small proportion of the arable land of an empire that counted its cultivated area in the hundreds of millions of *mu*. The Manchus did not take China's land. They took a ring of it around their capital, and it was never intended to support

them; it was intended to be an endowment on top of the thing that actually supported them, which was the treasury.

Four taels a room

The other half of the physical settlement was urban and it was executed with the same directness.

In 1648 an edict over the young Shunzhi emperor's name ordered the Han official and commoner population of Beijing to remove itself from the northern city — the great walled rectangle around the palace — and resettle in the southern city, so that banner people and civilians should live apart and not come into conflict. The northern city was then distributed among the banners by compass point, following the arrangement that had governed banner encampments in the Manchu homeland before the conquest: the Yellow Banners north of the palace, the White to the east, the Red to the west, the Blue to the south. Han bannermen were included in the distribution; Han civilians were not.

The households evicted were compensated at four taels a room.

That figure is the whole settlement in miniature and it is why this module carries its name. An imperial capital was re-partitioned along a line that was not economic, not military in any immediate sense, and not religious, but simply a line between those on a register and those not; and the people on the wrong side of it were bought out at a rate a clerk could calculate with an abacus. Four taels was roughly a month's pay for a banner cavalryman. It was not nothing and it was not remotely the value of a house in the capital.

The same operation was repeated across the empire in smaller form. Banner garrisons were placed in a limited number of strategic cities — something on the order of twenty to thirty of them over the course of the dynasty — and in each the bannermen and their families occupied a separate walled quarter, the Manchu city, physically divided from the Chinese population around it. Where no suitable quarter existed, as at Qingzhou, a new fortified town was built to hold them. The garrison was not billeted among the population. It was walled away from the population, which tells you something about how the arrangement was expected to work and how much it was expected to cost.

An income, not an estate

Now the terms of membership, which are the heart of the settlement and which the framework's usual categories do not quite reach.

A bannerman was paid. Under the Kangxi-era regulations a vanguard soldier, imperial guardsman or company sergeant drew four taels of silver a month; a cavalryman three taels, with an annual grain allowance of forty-six *hu*; an infantry sergeant two taels; an ordinary infantryman one and a half taels, with twenty-two *hu* of grain. Additional provision was made on campaign. The whole was paid by the court, in perpetuity, to a man and after him to his household's next serving male, and it came to be known as the iron rice bowl, because it did not depend on the harvest, the market, or anything the recipient did.

And a bannerman was forbidden to do anything else. He could not farm, could not engage in trade, could not take up a craft. He could not leave his garrison without permission. The prohibitions were not incidental restrictions on an otherwise landed nobility; they were the definition of the class. What the Qing created in 1644 was a hereditary caste whose members were legally barred from every productive activity available to their subjects and were compensated for that bar with a claim on the revenue.

Hold the two halves of that together, because the combination is not in this collection anywhere else. The Mamluk device produced a ruling caste that held claims rather than things — no heritable land, no transmissible rank, the position re-purchased from abroad each generation — and it bought extraordinary coherence at the price of periodic dispossession and a countryside nobody had reason to maintain. The Norman settlement produced the opposite: heritable things, land held by families who worked and improved it, a baronage absorbed into the conquered population within a century and a half. The Qing banner settlement takes the *claim* from the first and the *heritability* from the second, and it puts a legal prohibition on production in the middle.

What that produces is a caste whose numbers grow at the rate any human population grows and whose income is a line in a budget. The banner rolls in 1644 carried something like a hundred thousand soldiers. The registered banner population in the nineteenth century was counted in the millions. Nothing in the arrangement scales, because the stipend is fixed per post and the posts are fixed, and the caste is forbidden the one thing that would let it absorb its own increase — earning a living. The livelihood

crisis this generates is visible in the record by the middle of the eighteenth century, and the solution the court eventually reached for is the most revealing act in the whole history of the institution: it expelled people from the banners. Han bannermen who had joined after 1644 were ordered out, leaving only the pre-conquest Liaodong contingent, and the caste was shrunk to fit the money.

The boundary, written into the criminal law

The register was not merely administrative. It carried a different law.

Under the Qing code a bannerman sentenced to a year of penal servitude served, instead, five days in the cangue. The same offence, the same court, a different body: a Chinese commoner went away for twelve months and a bannerman stood in a wooden collar for five days. Bannermen were tried through their own channels rather than through the ordinary civil hierarchy, and a set of separate procedures grew up around them.

Alongside that ran the harshest single instrument of the early settlement, the fugitive law. Banner households owned bondservants and slaves, and after 1644 those people ran — into a Chinese countryside where the institution barely existed and where a man could disappear into a market economy. The Qing response was to impose severe penalties not only on the fugitive but on whoever harboured him and, in the early versions, on the harbourer's neighbours, who were mostly Han and mostly had no idea whom they were sheltering. It became, in Xiangyu Hu's account, one of the principal sites of Manchu–Han conflict through the Shunzhi and Kangxi reigns, and it was fought over inside the government for decades, with successive rulers narrowing it and Han legal principle gradually prevailing.

The end of that argument is the part worth carrying forward. The law's purpose changed. It began as a device for keeping banner slaves from escaping their masters, and it ended as a device for keeping bannermen from leaving their posts. The same statute that had been built to hold the caste's property in place was turned around and used to hold the caste itself in place — which is what happens when a privileged class discovers that its privileges are also a fence, and when the state discovers that its warrior caste would quite like to go and do something else.

Sixteen in a hundred

And now the fact that reorganises the whole module, because it makes nonsense of the word "Manchu" as a description of what was inside the settlement.

By 1648, less than one-sixth of the bannermen were of Manchu ancestry. The figures usually given break down to something like sixteen per cent Manchu, seventy-five per cent in the Han banners, and the remainder Mongol.

Four years after the conquest, three-quarters of the conquest caste were Chinese. They were Chinese of a particular kind — the Liaodong military families, the artillerymen, the men who had come over at Fushun and Dalinghe and Songshan, together with their households and descendants — and they had been enrolled on standing terms years before Beijing fell. They held the same legal privileges, drew the same kind of stipend, took the same enclosed land, moved into the same walled quarters, and in the early decades they held a great deal more than that: Han bannermen made up the majority of provincial governors under the first two reigns, and the three Liaodong officers who conquered the south — Shang Kexi, Geng Zhongming and Kong Youde — governed it afterwards as viceroys.

Intermarriage was not initially forbidden either. A decree of 1648 permitted Han civilian men to marry banner Manchu women, with the permission of the Board of Revenue where the woman was a registered daughter of an official or commoner, or of the company captain where she was not. It was later in the dynasty that such permissions were withdrawn.

So the boundary of the Qing settlement in 1648 was not ethnicity, ancestry, language or descent. It was enrolment. A man was inside because his name was in a company register, and the registers had been filled by a recruiting policy that took whoever came over early enough. This is a genuinely unusual settlement boundary and it explains a great deal that is otherwise puzzling about the dynasty's later behaviour — the anxious edicts about Manchu language and archery, the forged genealogies, the eighteenth-century expulsions, the hardening of intermarriage rules. Those are not the natural conservatism of an ancient nobility protecting its blood. They are the successive attempts of a state to convert an administrative roll into a people, undertaken by a court that needed the caste smaller for fiscal reasons and found that descent was the only criterion by which it could defensibly be cut.

What the conquered elite was allowed to keep

Against all of that, set what the Chinese landholding and degree-holding class was offered, and notice how little it cost the Qing to offer it.

Their land was confirmed. There was no general expropriation of Chinese private property, and outside the enclosure zone in the north the great majority of landowners simply went on owning what they had owned under the Ming.

Their tax was cut. When the Qing came to compile their own land and service registers they took the Ming figures from the Wanli reign as the base, and the revised *Fuyi quanshu* published in 1657 set the quota deliberately at the level prevailing *before* the three military levies of 1618 to 1638 — the Liao levy, the bandit-suppression levy and the training levy that had funded the war against the Manchus themselves and had helped drive the peasantry of the northwest into rebellion. The Qing thus financed nothing of their own conquest from those surcharges and took credit for abolishing them. The document's stated purpose was to stop local officials collecting more than the official quota allowed.

Their ladder was restored. The examinations resumed in 1646, on the triennial cycle, with the curriculum unchanged; and the essay question set to the candidates in that first Qing examination asked them how Manchus and Han might work together for a common purpose.

And their officials kept their posts, on the terms Dorgon had published two days after entering Beijing: submit, shave, and stay in office.

The one great expropriation of the settlement fell not on the Chinese gentry but on the previous dynasty's own family. The Ming imperial clan had accumulated princely estates on an enormous scale — a nominal seven hundred and fifty thousand *qing* by the mid-sixteenth century, several times the entire banner enclosure — and from 1645 the Qing set about confiscating them, selling them off as taxable private property or renting them out as government land, a project so administratively difficult that by the early Kangxi reign revenue was being extracted from only about twenty-eight per cent of the total. From 1669 the category was regularised under the name of renamed lands.

State that plainly and the elegance of it is hard to miss. The Qing confirmed the Chinese landowning class in its property, cut its taxes to pre-war levels, reopened its

route to office within two years — and financed the gesture out of the confiscated private estates of the family they had replaced. A conqueror who can pay his new subjects with the old dynasty's patrimony has bought an elite for nothing.

The price of the offer

It was not a gift, and the terms became visible in 1661.

Jiangnan had been the wealthiest region of the Ming, the heartland of the gentry, the last to submit, and by far the largest source of tax arrears — arrears being a form of resistance that gentry families had practised against their own dynasty for a century. In 1661 the Qing settled the matter in two blows. In the tax-arrears case, the *zouxiao an*, thousands of Jiangnan degree-holders were struck from the rolls for owing tax, some of them for trivial sums; the punishment was not confiscation but the removal of the credential, which carried the exemptions, the standing and the route to office. In the same year, at Suzhou, a group of literati staged a formal public lamentation at the Confucian temple against a magistrate's tax exactions and against corruption in the grain administration — a traditional and until then broadly tolerated form of protest. Eighteen of them were executed, among them the critic and editor Jin Shengtan.

Read the two cases together and the consideration is exact. What the Qing bought from the Chinese elite was not military service — the gentry were never asked for retinues and never permitted them — but tax and quiet. What they paid with was land, degrees and office. And what they demonstrated in 1661, in the region that mattered most, was that the payment was revocable at the state's discretion and that the instrument of revocation was the register of degree-holders. The gentry kept their fields. The state kept the list.

The one grant that bought an army

There is a single exception to all of the above and it is the exception the framework predicts.

The southwest could not be held from Beijing during the wars against the Southern Ming, and so it was given away. Wu Sangui received Yunnan — at Hong Chengchou's urging, the court granted him effective civil and military control of the province in 1659 — with Shang Kexi in Guangdong and Geng Jimao in Fujian holding comparable

positions. These men were not paid to stop being warlords. They were paid to go on being warlords in the Qing interest: they kept their own armies, drew on their own provincial revenues, made their own appointments, and owed service.

A grant that purchases armed service leaves a rival with a retinue. In 1673 the court moved to recall the feudatories and all three rose. The war lasted eight years, at its worst the Qing held little south of the Yangtze, and Wu Sangui died in 1678 having proclaimed a dynasty of his own. What the court built afterwards — the abolition of the feudatories, the separation of provincial military commands, the long transfer of Chinese and Mongol elements out of the banners — was the machinery for making sure the terms were never offered again.

The default, down the chain

Ask of each party what happens to him if this arrangement collapses tomorrow, and the answers explain the next two centuries.

The Manchu bannerman in a garrison quarter loses his stipend, his grain, his legal privilege and his quarter, and has no trade, no land he works and no permission to travel. He is the most completely dependent person in the settlement and he has the least ability to do anything about it, which is precisely why the arrangement could afford to treat him as it did.

The Han bannerman is in the same position with one difference: he has relatives outside the walls, and in the eighteenth century, when the money runs short, he is the one who is put out. He knows it, and it shapes how he behaves.

The Chinese landowner keeps his land under any regime that can enforce contracts, so his stake is not in the Qing but in order as such. The degree-holder is different: his standing exists only because a state confers it, his exemptions come from a register the state controls, and 1661 showed him exactly how quickly the register can be edited. He is bound more tightly than the landowner and by a thinner thread.

The tenant on a banner estate in Zhili is worse off than he was under the Ming and would be better off if the estate were dissolved, and he is the only person in the chain of whom that is straightforwardly true.

The provincial official — the great majority of them Han bannermen in the early decades — holds a post that exists because a conquest created it and that he would not hold under a restored Ming. He defends the arrangement by defending himself.

That last line is the settlement's real constitution, and it is why the machinery of the enclosures and the quarters and the stipends could be so crude without endangering anything. The people who made the order work were not being coerced into it. They had been given something they would lose.

Reading the settlement against the framework

Where the conquered order already runs alienable private property in a register, the conqueror needs no legal fiction about land at all, and the settlement's boundary moves from the deed to the roll. The recurring conquest fictions in this collection are answers to a problem the Qing did not have: they are ways of changing what a thing *is* so that taking it becomes lawful — occupied ground declared vacant, manufactured possession declared long-held, collective holding declared partible. Every one of those is an instrument for converting a relation between persons into a transferable thing, and the conqueror needs it because his own metropole believes in property and will not tolerate naked seizure. In China there was no metropole to satisfy and the conversion had been completed centuries earlier. The result is a settlement with no land-theory in it whatsoever — men with rope walked the fields, and that was the entire legal apparatus of the enclosure. What the Qing had to construct instead was a doctrine of *persons*: an enrolment that carried a stipend, a separate criminal liability, a residential quarter and a prohibition on trade. The analytic instruction is to check the prior form first, and where it is already a thing held by a market, stop looking for the statute and go and find the register.

Heritable claims on a treasury, with production forbidden, is a distinct settlement type and it fails demographically. The corpus has held non-heritable claims at one pole and heritable things at the other, with the first buying coherence at the cost of periodic dispossession and the second dissolving into the conquered population within a few generations. This case supplies the third combination and it is worse than either. A caste that inherits its position but owns no productive asset and is legally barred from acquiring one has an income that cannot grow and a population that will; the arithmetic does not resolve, and the only variables available to the state are the size of the stipend and the size of the roll. The Qing eventually moved the roll, which meant

expelling people from the caste — and the expulsions fell on the least Manchu members, because once a state must shrink a hereditary class it will reach for descent, since descent is the only criterion that cannot be argued with. **Where a settlement pays a hereditary class in claims and forbids it production, expect the class to be culled rather than the claim to be reduced, and expect the cull to be justified by an ancestry criterion that was not the original condition of entry.**

A conquest caste can be composed mainly of the conquered, and the boundary can be an administrative roll rather than a bloodline. In 1648 fewer than one in six bannermen were of Manchu ancestry, roughly three-quarters were in the Han banners, and Han bannermen supplied the majority of provincial governors; intermarriage was permitted by decree in the same year. This is the single most disorienting fact in the early Qing settlement and it should be allowed to do its work rather than smoothed over, because the alternative is to write the dynasty as a Manchu occupation and then be unable to explain who was actually running it. The mechanism is straightforward: the terms of enrolment were published in advance and applied for decades before the conquest, so the register filled with whoever arrived early, and the conquest itself was won by a caste that was already majority Chinese. **Where a conquering power recruits by enrolment rather than by descent, its "conquest caste" is a bureaucratic category and will be ethnically miscellaneous from the start — and the ethnic definition, where one later appears, should be read as a subsequent construction serving a subsequent need rather than as the founding condition.**

And the cheapest possible purchase of a conquered elite is one financed from the previous dynasty's private property. The Qing confirmed Chinese landholding, set the tax quota at pre-war Wanli levels explicitly excluding the surcharges that had funded the war against them, restored the examinations within two years, and kept serving officials in post — while confiscating the Ming imperial clan's princely estates, nominally three-quarters of a million *qing*, and turning them into taxable private land. Every element of the offer to the Chinese elite was either a confirmation of something they already had or a remission of something a previous ruler had imposed, and the one real transfer of wealth in the settlement ran from the deposed royal family to the treasury. **Look, in any conquest, for property that belonged specifically to the displaced ruling house: it is the only asset a conqueror can distribute without cost to anyone whose loyalty he needs.** What this purchases, and what 1661 shows him collecting when it is not delivered, is tax and quiet — never a retinue. The single grant in this settlement that did buy armed service, in the three southwestern provinces, produced an eight-year civil war

within fifteen years, and the court's response was to make certain the terms were never offered again.

A note on sources. This module quotes no primary text exactly, and the omission is deliberate: the instruments it describes — the *quandi* orders, the 1648 separation edict, the banner stipend regulations, the occupational prohibitions, the fugitive statutes and the *Fuyi quanshu* — survive in Chinese and I have not verified any of their wording against an edition or a scholarly translation reproducing it. Where an arresting phrase appears above it is my own paraphrase of a modern summary, not a rendering of a document, and the wording of these instruments remains a research target. One near-quotation must be flagged specifically: the 1648 edict ordering Han officials and commoners to remove to the southern city is reproduced in English in at least one popular source, and I have not used that rendering, because I could not trace it to an edition. The figure of four taels a room comes from the same secondary literature and should be treated as reported rather than verified. Everything else here is paraphrase from modern scholarship and is credited where it carries weight: the standard reference literature on banner land and the enclosures for the 160,000-*qing* total and the tiered categories of estate; Mark Elliott on the banner system, garrison life and the maintenance of a distinct Manchu identity; Xiangyu Hu's 2020 study of the fugitive regulations for the finding that the law's purpose shifted from restraining slaves to restraining bannermen and that Han legal principle gradually prevailed inside the government; Harry Miller on the state–gentry conflict of 1644–1699; Xiaoqun Xu for the Ming princely estates, the confiscation project launched in 1645 and the renamed-lands category of 1669; and standard reference accounts for the *Fuyi quanshu* revisions of 1654 and 1657 and their explicit reversion to the pre-1618 quota. Figures are given as ranges or as reported values because several are contested or imprecise. The banner enclosure total is given in the reference literature as more than 160,000 *qing* across three rounds between 1644 and 1685, which is a summary figure rather than a survey. The Kangxi-era stipend rates — four taels a month for vanguard and guard troops, three for cavalry with forty-six *hu* of grain a year, two for infantry sergeants, one and a half for infantry with twenty-two *hu* — are the regulation rates and not necessarily what was paid. The 1648 ethnic composition of the banners is given by Britannica as less than one-sixth of Manchu ancestry, and the more granular breakdown of roughly sixteen, seventy-five and nine per cent circulates in the reference literature without my having traced it to its underlying source; the underlying counts are of registered adult males and the categories are themselves contested, since bannermen forged genealogies and moved between banners.

The Ming princely estate total of 750,000 *qing* is a mid-sixteenth-century nominal figure, and the 28 per cent from which the Qing actually drew revenue in the early Kangxi reign is Xu's. Finally, the interpretation of the eighteenth-century banner expulsions as a fiscal cull rests on the reference literature's statement that post-conquest Han bannermen were ordered out to relieve livelihood pressure while the pre-conquest Liaodong contingent remained; the chronology and the internal politics of those orders should be verified in the specialist literature before the point is treated as settled.

MODULE 3

THOSE WHO COMPLY ARE THE PEOPLE OF OUR STATE

Module 3 · The robe — a dynasty that imported no doctrine, took up the conquered order's entire legitimating vocabulary, knelt nine times at the sage's tomb, and simultaneously required every adult male in the empire to carry the mark of submission on his head

Two documents, eighty-five years apart

On the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month of the second year of Shunzhi — 21 July 1645 — an edict went out from Beijing whose operative sentences the *Veritable Records* preserve. If the practice is not made uniform, it begins, men will remain of two minds. Then: from the publication of this proclamation, within the capital and its environs, a limit of ten days; in Zhili and the provinces, ten days from the day the ministry's despatch arrives; all are to be made to shave. 遵依者為我國之民，遲疑者同逆命之寇，必置重罪 — *those who comply are the people of our state; those who hesitate are the same as bandits defying the mandate, and must be given heavy punishment.* Any who evade, who begrudge their hair, who argue with clever words, are on no account to be lightly pardoned. And then the clause that is usually left out of the quotation: the civil and military officials of every locality are to inspect strictly, and if any of them again submits a memorial on this matter, wishing the people of pacified districts to retain the Ming system rather than follow the institutions of this dynasty, 殺無赦 — he is to be put to death without mercy.

Eighty-five years later, in 1730, the Yongzheng emperor published a book. It concerned a failed schoolmaster named Zeng Jing who had written to a provincial governor-general urging him to rebel against a barbarian dynasty. Rather than executing him, the emperor interrogated him at length, extracted a recantation, printed the whole exchange together with his own rebuttals, and ordered it distributed throughout the empire. The core of the rebuttal reads: 不知本朝之為滿洲，猶中國之有籍貫。舜為東夷之人，文王為西夷之人，曾何損於聖德乎 — *they fail to understand that this dynasty's being Manchu is like a Chinese man's having a native place. Shun was a*

man of the Eastern Yi; King Wen was a man of the Western Yi. What harm did that do to their sagely virtue?

The emperor is quoting Mencius. The passage is in the fourth book, second part, and every candidate who ever sat a Chinese examination had it by heart: Shun born at Chufang, removed to Fuxia, dead at Mingtiao, a man of the Eastern Yi; King Wen born at Zhou by Mount Qi, dead at Biying, a man of the Western Yi. James Legge, translating in the nineteenth century, softened both to "a man near the wild tribes," which is not what the Chinese says and is itself a small monument to how uncomfortable the sentence is.

Hold those two documents together, because they are the module. A dynasty that put men to death for asking whether their neighbours might keep their hair was, in the same century, defending its right to rule by citing the conquered civilisation's second sage to the effect that the founders of that civilisation had been barbarians too. Neither document is a lapse. Both are the order working exactly as designed, and the design becomes visible only when you stop asking which one represents the real Qing and start asking what each was for.

The robe they did not have to make

Begin with what is absent, because the absence is the finding.

The Qing imported no religion. They founded no church, translated no scripture into Chinese, sent out no missionaries, required no conversion, and made no claim that the Chinese had been living in error. They did not, as the Arab conquerors of Egypt did, bring a law and a calendar; they did not, as the Spanish did in Peru, bring a god who required the destruction of the local one. Nothing in the Qing legitimating apparatus is Manchu in origin. Every element of it was on the shelf when they arrived.

They took the Mandate of Heaven. On 30 October 1644 a six-year-old sacrificed at the Altar of Heaven in the southern suburbs of Beijing, and on 8 November he was enthroned as emperor of China by a ritual the Ming would have recognised in every particular. They took the office of Son of Heaven, the imperial ancestral temple, the state sacrifices, the ritual calendar, the reign-name system, and the whole apparatus of cosmological legitimation that had been running, with interruptions, for two thousand years.

They took the examinations. The triennial cycle resumed in 1646 with the curriculum untouched — the Four Books, the Five Classics, Zhu Xi's commentaries, the eight-legged essay — so that the men who would administer the Qing were being formed by exactly the texts that had formed the men who administered the Ming, in exactly the same way.

They took the historiographical obligation. A new dynasty writes its predecessor's history; that is how the mandate's transfer is recorded, and the Qing began the *Ming History* project and pursued it for the better part of a century.

They took the village liturgy. The Hongwu emperor had issued Six Maxims to be carried through every village of the Ming empire and expounded at local gatherings. In 1670 the sixteen-year-old Kangxi emperor issued sixteen maxims of seven characters each, to be posted in every town and village and read aloud twice a month, on the first and the fifteenth, by a local scholar who had to paraphrase the classical wording into whatever dialect his audience spoke. In 1724 the Yongzheng emperor issued a ten-thousand-character amplification, one commentary of some six hundred words for each maxim, explaining in his preface that his words were meant to be direct and plain. Vernacular versions followed, the most popular by a *jinshi* named Wang Youpu. The readings were compulsory. The practice ran into the twentieth century, by which time observers noted that the only people present were those obliged to attend.

And they took the sage. In the eleventh month of 1684, returning from his first southern tour, the Kangxi emperor turned aside at Qufu in Shandong, went to the temple of Confucius, and performed the three kneelings and nine prostrations — the full abasement, nine knocks of the head, the form reserved for Heaven and for the emperor himself. He bestowed a plaque. He had already built a hall within the palace for the worship of Confucius and restored the privilege by which the sage's descendants were sent to the Imperial Academy. On the same tour and its successors he sacrificed at the tomb of Yu the Great at Shaoxing and at the mausoleum of the founding emperor of the Ming at Nanjing — the man whose dynasty his own had replaced, and whose proclamation of 1367 had called for the expulsion of the northern barbarians.

Count what that cost. Not much in money. Rather more in something else: an emperor who in 1684 had crushed the feudatories three years earlier and taken Taiwan the year before, who faced no armed rival anywhere in the empire, and who could have required anything of anyone, went and knelt nine times at the grave of a dead Chinese teacher and burned incense for a dead Chinese emperor. Nobody made him. That is the

whole content of the revealed-preference test and it does not need elaborating: an apex with uncontested force that pays a real, avoidable price for recognition has told you, by the payment, that some audience's recognition was worth having. The audience at Qufu was the Chinese scholar-official class, and what Kangxi was buying from them was their willingness to go on staffing his government.

The mark they did have to impose

Now the other half, and it needs its history, because the queue did not begin in 1645 and was never merely a hairstyle.

From very early in the Liaodong wars, Qing documents describe surrender as *tifa guijiang* — shaving-and-submitting. Populations that came over are "the people who shaved and submitted to us." Cities taken whose officials and inhabitants had not shaved were not counted as having genuinely submitted. Under Hong Taiji, a Ming officer who surrendered at Hanerzhuang in 1629 is recorded as leading the townspeople out with shaved heads; the garrison at Shahe in 1630 was received on the same terms. When the Ming commander Zhang Chun was captured at the Dalinghe siege and refused to shave, the refusal was the whole point: he had not submitted, whatever else he had done.

So by 1644 the practice was already the definition of allegiance in the conquerors' own administrative language, and this is why the order came out almost immediately. Two days after entering Beijing, on 7 June 1644, Dorgon told the officials around the capital that populations which shaved and submitted would have their officials confirmed in post. About three weeks later he withdrew the requirement, because it was producing risings in districts the Qing could not simultaneously hold. Thirteen months later, with Nanjing fallen and the first Southern Ming court destroyed, it came back in the form quoted above, with ten days and a sword. A companion order followed on 9 July 1645: officials and people having already shaved, caps and clothing were likewise to follow the institutions of this dynasty.

The resistance it provoked was the most serious the conquest faced. Jiangyin held a siege of some eighty days over this and nothing else. Jiading rose more than once. The accounts written afterwards — of Yangzhou, of Jiading, of Jiangyin — were reprinted by revolutionaries two and a half centuries later precisely because the queue was still on every head and the memory could be reattached to it.

But look at the edict's own logic rather than at its consequences. It does not argue that shaving is virtuous, or pleasing to Heaven, or required by the classics. It argues from uniformity: if the practice is not made uniform, men will remain of two minds. And it defines the polity's membership by compliance — those who comply are the people of our state; those who hesitate are bandits. There is a doctrinal wrapper available and the Qing sometimes used it, the notion that ruler is to subject as father to son and that one body should not be of two appearances. But the wrapper is thin and the enforcement clause is thick, and the thickest clause of all is the one threatening death to officials who *petition about the policy*. That is not a provision aimed at men with long hair. It is aimed at men with brushes, and it tells you the court knew exactly how weak the doctrinal case was and had decided not to have the argument.

Why an order needs both

Set the two halves side by side and the apparent contradiction dissolves, because they are answers to different questions asked by different people.

The robe answers: *by what right do you rule?* It is addressed to the Chinese literate class, to the record, and to the emperor's own officials, and it is answered in their vocabulary because there is no other vocabulary in which the answer would be intelligible. Heaven's mandate passes to virtue; the Ming lost it through misgovernment; a bandit seized and forfeited it; we picked it up and we perform the rites correctly. Every term in that sentence is Chinese and every one of them was accepted by the audience before the Manchus arrived.

The queue answers: *who has submitted?* And this question cannot be answered by the robe, for a reason that is structural rather than accidental and that I think is the sharpest thing in this module.

A conqueror who adopts the conquered order's legitimating doctrine entire has adopted a doctrine his enemies also believe. In 1645 the Southern Ming court at Nanjing claimed the Mandate of Heaven. So did Li Zicheng's remnant. So did Zhang Xianzhong in Sichuan. So did the Qing. All four were making the identical claim in the identical language, with the identical texts, and the doctrine contained no rule for deciding among them except the outcome — which is exactly what makes it such a cheap robe for a winner and such a useless instrument for telling a subject from an enemy. A Manchu bannerman riding into a Jiangnan town could not distinguish a Qing subject

from a Ming loyalist by anything either of them believed, said, wore, or worshipped, because they believed, said, wore and worshipped the same things.

The white cloth tied to Wu Sangui's men at Shanhai Pass solved that problem for one afternoon. The queue solved it permanently. It made allegiance visible at a hundred paces, individually, on every adult male body in the empire, and — this is its particular elegance — it made defection expensive in a way no oath could, because a man who changed his mind needed several years of hair to change it back.

So the queue is not an element of the robe at all. It is an instrument of the floor wearing a thin doctrinal coat, and the generalisation worth carrying out of this case is: **where a conqueror borrows his entire legitimating doctrine from the conquered, expect him to impose a separate, non-doctrinal, bodily mark of submission — because a borrowed robe cannot tell his subjects from his enemies, who are wearing it too.** The cheaper the robe, the more necessary the mark.

More than one audience, more than one robe

The Confucian robe was not the only one, and the Qing ran the others simultaneously without translating between them.

To the Mongols the emperor was a khan, heir to the Chinggisid line, and the relationship was conducted in Mongolian, through marriage alliance and through a ministry established in 1638 specifically for Mongol and later Inner Asian affairs. To the Tibetan Buddhist world he was a patron and, in the idiom of that world, an emanation of the bodhisattva Manjusri, whose earthly seat is the mountain of Wutai in Shanxi; the imperial patronage of Wutai Shan is documented in the gazetteers and in government records — troops sent to guard a monastery in 1684, a monastery built with three thousand taels of gold in 1685, canons presented at a lama's request, gilt images of bodhisattvas dispatched from the palace workshops to flank a Manjusri in 1705. To his own banner people he was the head of the Aisin Gioro and the apex of a system with its own shamanic rites, its own language, its own archive.

Whether this amounts to a coherent doctrine of universal rulership or to four separate performances for four separate constituencies is the central dispute of the last thirty years of Qing scholarship, and this study is not going to settle it. What matters structurally is simpler and is not in dispute: the idioms were kept largely apart, and each audience was paid in its own currency. The Chinese official at Qufu saw an emperor performing the

rites of a Confucian sovereign. The Mongol prince saw a khan. The lama at Wutai saw a patron. None of them was being lied to; all of them were being addressed. And the older cliché — that the Manchus were simply absorbed into Chinese civilisation and became Chinese emperors — has been seriously contested for a generation on exactly this evidence, that a court which was merely sinicised would not have needed a Manchu-language archive, a Mongol ministry, and a bodhisattva.

The instruction that follows for the framework is one it already holds and this case confirms with unusual clarity: check for more than one audience before reading two inconsistent claims as cynicism. An emperor who kowtows at Qufu and is worshipped as a bodhisattva at Wutai is not being inconsistent. He is being paid in two currencies by two creditors who do not read each other's ledgers.

The argument the dynasty could not afford to win

Which brings us back to Zeng Jing, and to the strangest episode in the history of this robe.

In October 1728 Zeng Jing, a failed licentiate from Hunan steeped in the writings of the Ming loyalist Lü Liuliang, sent an emissary to Yue Zhongqi, governor-general of Shaanxi and Sichuan and a descendant of the Song patriot Yue Fei, urging him to rise against the Manchus. The letter also accused the Yongzheng emperor of usurping the throne and murdering his brothers. Yue reported it; Zeng was arrested.

What happened next has no parallel in the Chinese imperial record. The emperor did not execute him. He interrogated him at length in writing, in an exchange that reads in its published form more like a tutorial than an inquisition; obtained a recantation; pardoned him; and then had the whole file — the original seditious letter, the interrogations, the imperial rebuttals, the confession — printed as the *Dayi juemi lu*, the *Record of Great Righteousness Resolving Confusion*, and distributed throughout the empire, with instructions that it be studied. Zeng Jing was sent home to Hunan with gifts.

The arguments Yongzheng made in it are the most complete statement of the Qing robe that exists. Being Manchu, he wrote, is like a Chinese man's having a native place — a fact about where one is from, not a fact about what one is. Shun and King Wen were Yi and it did not diminish their sagehood. He drew on Han Yu for the proposition that Yi can become Hua and Hua can become Yi. He argued that under his dynasty both were

now of one family. And underneath all of it sat the unanswerable structural point: the doctrine of the Mandate specifies virtue and government as its criteria and says nothing whatever about ancestry, so a barbarian who governs well holds the mandate by the conquered civilisation's own rule, stated in the conquered civilisation's own canon.

It is a good argument. It is arguably the correct reading of the texts. And within months of his accession in 1735, the Qianlong emperor recalled every copy of the book and destroyed it, in direct defiance of his father's explicit instruction that the case never be reopened, and executed Zeng Jing, whom his father had pardoned.

Qianlong offered a reason — that his father had spared Zeng because Zeng's slanders had been aimed at Yongzheng personally, whereas now they touched an imperial ancestor. Scholars have offered others: that the book aired far too much about the succession and the court, that circulating a defence was more dangerous than the accusation it answered, that a text arguing about the dynasty's legitimacy taught readers that the legitimacy was arguable.

They amount to the same thing, and it is the module's second finding. **A robe that must be argued for in public has already torn, and the successor's suppression of the argument is a more reliable measurement of the tear than the argument itself.** Yongzheng thought he could win the debate and printed it. Qianlong concluded that having the debate at all was the injury, and burned it. Two emperors, one doctrine, opposite methods; and the one who came second, with more information and less to prove, judged that the safest condition for a borrowed robe is that nobody discusses where it came from. What followed under his reign — the great literary inquisition, conducted alongside and partly through the compilation of the imperial library — is the working out of that judgement, and it belongs to the account of how this order handled information rather than to the account of its doctrine.

Did they believe it?

The question has to be asked and the instrument for asking it is limited. At the apex only, and only probabilistically: watch for deviation, for what a ruler does when nobody who matters is watching and no advantage accrues.

By that test the Kangxi emperor's Confucianism looks like conviction rather than performance. He built a hall inside the palace for the worship of Confucius, where the audience was himself. He learned the classics seriously enough to argue about them with

men who had spent their lives on them. The prostrations at Qufu were public, but the pattern around them is not the pattern of a man executing a policy; it is the pattern of a man who had been formed by the Chinese curriculum from childhood and held its categories as his own. That his grandfather had ordered the country's heads shaved and that he himself ruled a caste walled off from the population he revered is not a contradiction he seems to have felt, and the framework's expectation here is that he would not have: a man raised inside an arrangement experiences it as the shape of the world rather than as an arrangement.

Yongzheng is harder and the evidence points the other way — a ruler who reached for the classics as ammunition in a specific fight and dropped them when the fight was over. Qianlong is harder still, and his suppression of his father's book is the act of a man managing a doctrine rather than holding one.

At the base the test is unavailable and should not be attempted. What can be said about the population is only what they did, and the queue supplies the most extraordinary datum in this study, though its meaning belongs to the account of the order's end: the mark imposed by massacre in 1645 was, by 1900, defended by the men wearing it as their own custom, and cutting it off had become a revolutionary act.

Reading the robe against the framework

A conqueror who adopts the conquered order's legitimating doctrine entire pays nothing for it and is then permanently unable to discuss his own origin. The card already holds that legitimacy is always borrowed from a specific audience's own currency. This case runs the borrowing to its limit — not one element of the Qing legitimating apparatus was Manchu — and shows what the limit costs. A conqueror with an imported creed can argue about that creed freely, because it is his: he owns the texts, the clergy and the exegesis, and disputes about it are disputes he is equipped to win. A conqueror using the conquered creed owns none of that. Every text in the argument is theirs, every commentator is theirs, and the canon contains the counter-arguments as well as the arguments — Mencius says that Shun was of the Eastern Yi, and he also says that he has heard of the doctrines of the great land being used to change barbarians but never of anyone being changed by them. So the borrowed robe is free at the point of acquisition and carries a permanent running cost in suppression, and the study should expect the bill to be presented not as theological dispute but as book-burning.

Where the robe is borrowed, expect a separate bodily mark of submission, and read it as an instrument of the floor rather than an element of the doctrine. This is the pairing that makes the Qing look incoherent at first sight — a dynasty performing the conquered civilisation's rites with total fidelity while ordering the conquered civilisation's heads shaved on pain of death — and the resolution is that the two instruments answer different questions. The doctrine answers *by what right?*; it is addressed to the literate and it works. The mark answers *who has submitted?*; it is addressed to the state's own eyes, and it exists precisely because the doctrine cannot answer it, since the Southern Ming, the Shun rebels and the Qing were all claiming the same mandate in the same words. The diagnostic to carry forward: **when an order imposes a compulsory alteration of the body, do not ask first what it symbolises; ask what it makes legible, to whom, and how expensive it is to reverse.** Here the answers were allegiance, to any soldier at a distance, and several years of hair — which is why the enforcement clause in the edict is aimed at officials who might petition about it rather than at peasants who might not comply.

An apex that must publish a defence of its own legitimacy has already lost the thing the defence is meant to protect, and the successor's response is the measurement. Yongzheng answered a treasonous letter with a book, printed it, distributed it as required reading, and pardoned the traitor. Qianlong recalled and destroyed the book within months of his accession and executed the pardoned man. The interesting datum is not that a Chinese emperor suppressed a text; it is *which* text — his own father's official defence of the dynasty. What that tells the analyst is that the court had concluded the question was more dangerous than any answer to it, which is a judgement only available to someone who has watched an answer circulate. **Where a study finds an order suppressing its own apologetics, it has found the point at which the order stopped believing the argument would hold, and that date is worth more than a hundred loyal memorials.**

And the recursion runs in the doctrine's own vocabulary. The Ming founding proclamation of 1367 had conceded that the Mongol conquest held Heaven's bestowal and had offered to cherish, no differently from Chinese, those Mongols and Semu who understood the rites. Three and a half centuries later a Manchu emperor made the same argument on his own behalf out of the same canon, and a Chinese schoolmaster denied it out of the same canon, and the emperor's grandson burned the book in which the argument had been conducted. The doctrine did not change hands with the throne; it stayed where it was and successive occupants argued from it. **A legitimating tradition**

deep enough to survive conquest is deep enough to arm both parties in the next one, and a conqueror who adopts it is not acquiring a weapon but entering a conversation he cannot control.

A note on sources. Two primary texts are quoted here in the original because their wording is the evidence, and both come with warnings. The queue edict of 21 July 1645 is quoted from the passage attributed in the reference literature to the *Veritable Records of the Shunzhi Reign*, juan 17, and to Jiang Liangqi's *Donghua lu*, juan 5 — 遵依者為我國之民，遲疑者同逆命之寇，必置重罪, and the concluding provision that officials memorialising for the retention of Ming practice be put to death without mercy. I have not seen an edition of either work; the Chinese is taken from secondary compilations that cite them, and the English rendering is my own. The passage from the *Dayi juemi lu* — 舜為東夷之人，文王為西夷之人，曾何損於聖德乎 — is likewise quoted from a source reproducing the Chinese rather than from an edition, and the English is again my own. Mencius IV.B.1 is given in James Legge's translation, which is out of copyright, and I have noted where his rendering of 東夷之人 softens the original; D. C. Lau's more direct version is in copyright and is not reproduced. The date of the clothing order, 9 July 1645, and the pre-conquest instances of *tifa guijiang* under Hong Taiji are taken from Chinese secondary accounts citing the Taizu and Taizong *Veritable Records*, and should be verified against those records before being treated as settled; the case of Zhang Chun is well attested but its details vary between accounts. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship: Pamela Crossley on the *Dayi juemi lu* and on Qing imperial ideology; Jonathan Spence's *Treason by the Book* for the Zeng Jing case; Victor Mair and the literature on the Sacred Edict for the sixteen maxims of 1670, the twice-monthly readings on the first and fifteenth, Yongzheng's ten-thousand-character amplification of 1724 and Wang Youpu's vernacular explication; and the standard reference literature for Kangxi's rites at Qufu in the eleventh month of 1684, his sacrifices at the tomb of Yu the Great and at the Ming founder's mausoleum, and the imperial patronage of Wutai Shan. The Wutai Shan figures — troops in 1684, a monastery built for 3,108 taels of gold in 1685, a thousand taels to Pusading in 1698, canons and gilt images in 1705 — come from a gazetteer-based account reproduced in a devotional source and should be checked against the scholarly literature on Qing Buddhist patronage before any weight is put on them. On the disputed matter of what the multiple idioms of Qing rulership amounted to, this module states the dispute rather than resolving it: the position that the dynasty maintained a deliberate Manchu identity and ruled a multi-ethnic empire in several registers at once has been argued for some

thirty years against the older sinicisation thesis, and the reader should take neither as settled. Finally, no Manchu-language source is cited anywhere above, and the *Jiu Manzhou dang* and the Manchu *Veritable Records* remain research targets rather than sources used.

MODULE 4

TO EVERY HAIR AND BIT OF SKIN

Module 4 · Formation — the sentence a Chinese boy learned at six, why it made two hundred million people cheap to govern by men who never met them, what happened when a conqueror wrote a new instruction onto a body already carrying an old one, and whether the conquest caste was formed the same way

The sentence they learned at six

The *Classic of Filial Piety* is a short text, some eighteen hundred characters, cast as a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Zeng. For most of two thousand years it was among the first things a Chinese child was given after his primer, learned by heart at five or six, before he could have had any opinion about it. Its opening chapter contains the sentence on which this module turns, and James Legge's translation is out of copyright and will do:

身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也 — *Our bodies, to every hair and bit of skin, are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial piety.*

Notice what is being installed and what is not. The child is not being told anything about gods, or about the emperor, or about the Mandate of Heaven, or about why the dynasty rules. He is being told what a body is: not his own, but a thing on loan from people he owes. He is being told that the debt is not payable and not escapable. And he is being told this at an age at which he has no equipment for weighing it, by the people on whom his survival entirely depends, in a sentence he will be able to recite for the rest of his life.

That is what formation is, and it is why the word *religion* is too small for it. Religion is a set of claims a person can examine, doubt, abandon, and be argued out of; a very great many Chinese did all four with respect to Buddhism, Daoism, the state cults, and the local gods, often several at once and without embarrassment. The thing installed by the

primer is not a claim at all. It is the furniture: the categories in which claims are subsequently made and examined. A man can lose his faith in the Jade Emperor without any difficulty. He cannot easily lose the sense that his body belongs partly to his father, because that is not a belief he holds but a shape his thinking has.

How widely was this installed? Literacy is contested — Evelyn Rawski's evidence from teacher supply and school density puts male literacy in the late Qing somewhere between thirty and forty-five per cent, and female between two and ten, while Ho Ping-ti's more conservative reading puts males nearer ten to twenty — and neither figure answers the question, because the *Classic of Filial Piety* did not need to be read to be known. It was recited in schools, quoted in village lectures, dramatised in the Twenty-Four Exemplars of Filial Piety, painted on walls, sung in opera, and enforced daily by grandmothers who had never held a brush. The illiterate majority did not get less of the formation. They got it through a different channel and possibly in a purer form, because they got it without the option of noticing that it was a text.

Why this makes a population cheap

Now the mechanism, and it must be stated carefully, because the lazy version — that people believe what they are told because they are simple — is false and would mislead everywhere it was applied.

Human beings are not credulous. They screen what they are told, weighing whether a source is competent to know and whether it has an interest in misleading them, and they check what they hear against what they already hold. Crude mass persuasion generally fails for exactly this reason. What the screening cannot do is verify the world; it reads cues that stand in for verification. And the Chinese arrangement supplied, for the ordinary man, a set of cues that would have satisfied any vigilance ever built.

The authority was not a stranger. It was his father, and then his lineage elders — people whose competence he could observe, whose intentions toward him were manifestly not hostile, who had paid for their own beliefs in a lifetime of visible practice. The group he was being asked to belong to was not an abstraction but the descent line whose land he farmed, whose hall held his ancestors' tablets, and outside of which he had no legal existence, no marriage prospects, no protection in a lawsuit, and — the part that has no modern equivalent — nobody to feed him after his death. Expulsion from a lineage was not social embarrassment. It was annihilation running in both directions in

time. The obligation itself was placed beyond calculation: a man asked to price his father's grave against a commercial advantage does not weigh the two and choose, he is disgusted at the question. The content arrived as story rather than as argument — Guo Ju about to bury his son to feed his mother, Wang Xiang lying on the ice to thaw a fish for his stepmother, the whole grotesque and unforgettable gallery of the Twenty-Four Exemplars, which is a set of narratives precisely because narratives get past the guard that arguments alert. And all of it was in place before the child was old enough to run any of the screening at all.

Set beside that the arithmetic of the Qing state. Something over thirteen hundred county magistrates, each with a few dozen clerks and runners, posted among strangers by a rule that barred them from serving in their home provinces and rotated them out every three or four years, governing a population that passed two hundred million in the seventeenth century and four hundred million in the nineteenth. That ratio is not administration. No apparatus of that size can compel a population of that size to do anything at all, and the Qing never seriously tried.

They did not have to, because the population was already being governed — by fathers over sons, elders over juniors, husbands over wives, lineages over branches, and neighbours over each other, in a system nobody was paying for and nobody had to supervise. The magistrate's actual job was not to make the order run. It was to sit at the point where the self-running order threw up a case it could not settle internally, and to certify outcomes the locality had mostly already reached.

This is the whole explanation of why the conquest was affordable. A hundred thousand bannermen could take a country of two hundred million because holding it did not require them to be present. What required their presence was the founding, and the exceptions, and the coast.

The administrator as the belt

The transmission ran through a class the Qing inherited intact and did not have to build.

A man who wanted office spent his youth memorising the Four Books with Zhu Xi's commentaries, and if he failed — as the overwhelming majority did, at rates of ninety-eight or ninety-nine per cent at the first hurdle alone — he did not thereby leave the system. He went home and taught, or wrote genealogies, or arbitrated disputes, or ran the lineage's charitable estate, or lectured at the village compact. Rawski's finding on the

supply of teachers turns on exactly this: there were far more men qualified to teach a village school than there were village schools, because the examination system manufactured, every generation, an enormous surplus of men formed in the orthodoxy and seated nowhere. That surplus is usually read as a political danger, and it was one. It was also the empire's teaching profession, unpaid by the state, distributed to every county in China, and self-replicating.

The state's own contribution to formation was narrow, cheap, and almost entirely a matter of certification rather than creation.

It ran a liturgy. The Kangxi emperor's sixteen maxims of 1670 were to be posted in every town and village and read aloud twice a month, on the first and the fifteenth, with a local scholar paraphrasing the classical wording into dialect because the audience could not follow it otherwise; the Yongzheng emperor added a ten-thousand-character amplification in 1724; vernacular explications followed. Attendance was compulsory. The practice survived into the twentieth century, by which point observers noted that the only people present were those obliged to be.

And it certified virtue. The *jingbiao* system — imperial testimonials of merit — had existed for centuries, and what the Qing did was industrialise it. The signature case is widow chastity. A widow who did not remarry, or who killed herself rather than be dishonoured, or who followed her husband into death, could have her household honoured: an exemption from corvée, a grant toward a commemorative arch, a name in the gazetteer. The arch did not carry her personal name. It carried her surname or her husband's, because the honour was the family's.

Watch what that price did. Dong Jiazun's counts, compiled in 1937 and still the standard starting point, record fifty-five chaste women in the *History of the Song*, a hundred and eighty-seven in the *History of the Yuan*, and more than ten thousand in the *History of the Ming*. Under the Qing the canonisations went on rising until, in Mark Elvin's and Susan Mann's judgement, the system had by 1845 become an assembly line. The state did not invent the ideal — it was in the classics, and the lineages had their own reasons for wanting widows to stay put, since a remarrying widow took her dowry and her son's claim out of the line. What the state did was attach a monument and a tax exemption to it, at a cost of perhaps thirty taels a case, and let several million families do the enforcing.

That is what a state does with a formation it did not build and cannot afford to build: it hangs a price on the behaviour it wants, and lets the families collect.

The year that taught the order

For the majority who never sat an examination and could not read a maxim, the formation arrived through the calendar, and the calendar was relentless.

The year opened with New Year, which is a lineage festival before it is anything else: the hall opened, the tablets dusted, the ancestors offered food and reported to, the living ranked by generation and age in the order of their bowing. Qingming in the spring took the whole line out to the graves to sweep them and feed the dead. The seventh month opened the gates for the hungry ghosts — the ones with no descendants to feed them, which is to say the ones whose line had failed, and every child watching understood without being told what happened to a man who had no sons. The winter solstice brought the household back to the hall. Between these ran the temple fairs, the local god's birthday processions, and above all the opera, which took the same handful of stories about loyal ministers, filial sons and chaste widows into every market town in the empire, for an audience that did not need to read.

Note what is being rehearsed at each of these. Not the dynasty. Not the emperor, who appears in the peasant's ritual year hardly at all. What is rehearsed is the ordering of persons — who bows to whom, who eats first, who speaks, whose tablet stands where — performed by the whole community several times a year, from infancy, with food and music attached. A man formed by fifty repetitions of that does not need to be told that hierarchy is natural. He has no other experience of what a gathering of people looks like.

And this is precisely why the order could survive a conquest without noticing much. The Qing changed the name on the reign period. They did not change who bowed to whom in the ancestral hall in the first month, because they had no reason to and no means of doing so if they had.

Then a conqueror wrote on top of it

Against all of that, set the edict of 21 July 1645: within ten days, every adult male in the empire to shave the front of his head.

Now put the two texts side by side, which is what the module exists to do.

Our bodies, to every hair and bit of skin, are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them. This is the beginning of filial piety. — memorised at six, by everyone, in the first chapter of the first moral text a Chinese child was given.

Those who comply are the people of our state; those who hesitate are the same as bandits defying the mandate. — imposed at swordpoint, on the same bodies, in 1645.

This is not a clash of customs and it is not, principally, about loyalty to the Ming. It is an imposed formation arriving at the exact site an embedded formation had sacralised, and demanding a permanent, public, individually visible violation of it. Everything about the resistance follows from that. Jiangyin held a siege of some eighty days over this and nothing else, having submitted to the Qing peaceably before the order arrived. Jiading rose over it more than once and was destroyed for it. The Chinese population of Liaodong had already risen against the same requirement twice, in 1622 and 1625, twenty years before the conquest. The official said to have urged Dorgon to reimpose the order, Sun Zhixie, was caught up in a Shandong rising in 1647 and killed along with his family. And Lu Xun's judgement, looking back from the twentieth century, was that what the Chinese of that generation rose over was not the loss of the country but the loss of the hair.

The compliance the Qing eventually obtained is usually dated at about a decade of martial enforcement, and it was obtained the way such compliance always is: by making the immediate cost of refusal exceed the cost of the violation, one head at a time, until a generation grew up for whom the question had already been settled before they were born.

And then it took

Which brings the module to its most important fact, and the one that makes the Qing case worth this much attention.

Two centuries later, the Taiping armies grew out the front of their hair. The population called them 長毛 — long hairs — and 髮逆, hair rebels. That name was not coined by the court. It was what ordinary Chinese people called them, because by 1850 the queue was simply what a Chinese man's head looked like, and a man with hair growing at the front was visibly a rebel.

Follow it further. When revolutionaries and students began cutting their queues around the turn of the twentieth century, they were performing a deliberate and dangerous act of rejection — and what they were rejecting was, by then, experienced by most of the people around them as Chinese custom. In Lu Xun's story *Storm in a Teacup*, set in a village in 1917, the crisis is that a boatman has lost his queue and the emperor may be coming back, and the village is frightened *for* him. The mark imposed by massacre in 1645 had become, by 1911, a thing men were afraid to be without.

State the mechanism plainly, because it is the most useful thing this study has so far produced. **An imposed formation is not accepted by the generation on which it is imposed; it is accepted by their grandchildren, because the grandchildren did not experience it as imposed.** The first generation knows it as an injury and fights. The second knows it as a fact of life imposed on their fathers. The third knows it as what a head looks like. The interval here is roughly two generations, and the case is unusually clean because the imposition is dated to a month, the resistance is documented city by city, and the completion of the process is visible in a nickname.

And hold the discipline that goes with it: naming the origin does not make the later belief false or the later believer a dupe. The men who defended their queues in 1900 were not confused about history — the memory of Yangzhou and Jiading was available and was being deliberately revived by revolutionaries precisely because it was not common knowledge any more. They were carrying something that had become theirs by the only route anything ever becomes anyone's, which is by being there before they were.

Were the bannermen formed differently?

They were, deliberately, and the attempt is one of the best-documented formation projects in the record — which is itself the finding, because a formation that has to be documented is a formation that is not working.

The programme had a name: *guoyu qishe*, the national language and mounted archery. Manchu was to be spoken; the bow was to be drawn from horseback; these two things, and not descent, were what the court came to define a Manchu as. There were government schools for bannermen, the *baqi guanxue*, with bilingual Manchu–Chinese textbooks, moral and military treatises, and instruction in shooting. There was a separate translation examination through which a bannerman could take a degree in Manchu.

The eighteenth-century court promoted the whole apparatus vigorously, and the surviving textbooks include volumes warning bannermen off gambling.

Now read the record against itself. A state that must run schools to teach its ruling caste its own language, examinations to certify that they still have it, and edicts complaining that they no longer speak it or shoot, is a state reporting the failure of a formation in the act of prosecuting it. By the early nineteenth century it is generally accepted that most bannermen were no longer fluent in Manchu. Elliott's argument — that what actually preserved Manchu identity into the twentieth century was not this conservative campaign but the lived reality of garrison life, the walls, the stipend, the separate legal liability, the shared position — is the strongest reading of the evidence and it is worth stating clearly: what held the caste together in the end was not what it had been taught but where it had been put.

And the traffic ran overwhelmingly the other way. The decisive figure is Elliott's: in sixty-one years on the throne the Qianlong emperor canonised more than twelve thousand two hundred chaste widows *within the eight banners alone* — at least two hundred a year across the Manchu, Mongol and Han divisions, something like a six-fold increase on the first century of Qing rule. The Manchu court was certifying Manchu widows as exemplars of a Chinese virtue, using a Chinese instrument, at a rate the Ming had never approached.

So the two formations in this empire were not symmetrical and the asymmetry is the point. The Chinese formation was installed by families, at family expense, for family reasons, reproduced itself without supervision, and required nothing of the state but a certificate and an arch. The Manchu formation was installed by the state, at state expense, in state schools, and had to be rescued by imperial campaign roughly every generation. One of these is a machine that runs itself. The other is a machine somebody has to keep starting.

Where formation was thin

It was thin in the obvious places and the state's response there tells you what it did when formation failed.

On the southwestern frontier among the non-Han peoples, in the boat communities of the southern rivers, among the hereditary "mean" occupations, and in the mountain margins where lineages were weak and the magistrate's runners did not go, the apparatus

described above simply did not reach — and it is precisely in those places that the heterodox sects flourished, that the White Lotus tradition ran, and that the Qing spent force. The empire's answer to thin formation was not more formation. It was registration, mutual-responsibility groupings, garrisons, and campaigns.

The one place where the state did attempt a formation of its own from scratch, on a population, was the coast after the Great Clearance and the frontier after conquest — and those are stories of resettlement and force rather than of belief. **An order that has to form a population it has just acquired discovers the true price of the thing it was getting free everywhere else.**

Reading formation against the framework

Formation is not doctrine, and its depth is measured by what it makes unthinkable rather than by what it makes believed. A Chinese farmer in 1700 could be indifferent to the Mandate of Heaven, sceptical about the emperor, cynical about the magistrate and rude about the local god, and be no less completely inside the order for any of it — because what had been installed in him was not an opinion but a set of categories: that a body is owed to the parents who made it, that the dead must be fed, that a person is a segment of a line. Opinions are the layer a person can inspect. Categories are the layer he inspects with. **The diagnostic instruction is to test formation by asking what a man cannot do rather than what he says he believes** — and this order supplies the demonstration, because the Qing found the limit by accident. They could change the dynasty, the calendar, the coinage, the tax registers and the men in every office in the empire without a rising worth the name, and they nearly lost the country over a haircut.

The cheapest formation is the one the ruled finance themselves, and the state's role in it is certification, not instruction. The Chinese apparatus was paid for by lineages, taught by the examination system's own rejects, policed by kin, and rehearsed by a ritual year nobody had to organise from a capital. The state's entire outlay was a fortnightly reading, an arch at thirty taels, and a corvée exemption. That is why the ratio of magistrates to subjects could be what it was, and therefore why a hundred thousand men could hold two hundred million. **Where a study finds an order governing at an implausible official-to-subject ratio, do not look for a hidden bureaucracy; look for a formation system the subjects pay for, and then ask who certifies rather than who teaches — because certification is where the state's leverage is, and it is bought at a fraction of the cost of the thing it steers.**

An imposed formation is resisted by the generation it is imposed on and inherited by their grandchildren, and the interval is about two generations. The corpus already holds that a built order becomes, over generations, the furniture of reality, and that the origin having been built does not make the later belief a lie. This case supplies the mechanism dated and the interval measured. Imposition July 1645; mass killing at Jiangyin and Jiading within months; roughly a decade of martial enforcement to general compliance; and by the 1850s the same population using the imposed mark as its own name for rebels, with a nickname — *long hairs* — that could only have been coined by people for whom the shaved forehead was normal. **So the test of whether an imposed formation has taken is not whether the population complies but whether it has begun policing the mark on its own account, and the tell is a piece of vernacular vocabulary the state did not issue.**

A caste formed by the state costs more and holds worse than a caste formed by families, and the tell is the existence of a programme. The Chinese formation generated no imperial anxiety because nobody had to maintain it. The Manchu formation generated schools, textbooks, translation examinations, a stream of edicts, and a slogan — *the national language and mounted archery* — and the slogan is the diagnostic, because a people do not need a name for the practice of being themselves unless they are losing it. Meanwhile the same court was canonising twelve thousand banner widows in one reign under the conquered civilisation's virtue system. **Where a ruling caste has an official curriculum for its own identity, the identity is already going, and the study should date the first such edict rather than the last.**

A note on sources. One primary text is quoted here in the original because the wording is the evidence: the opening chapter of the *Xiaojing*, 身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也, in James Legge's translation, which is out of copyright. The queue edict of 21 July 1645 is quoted in the short form used in the preceding module and carries the same warning: the Chinese is taken from secondary compilations citing the *Veritable Records of the Shunzhi Reign*, juan 17, and Jiang Liangqi's *Donghua lu*, juan 5, and I have not seen an edition of either. The terms 長毛 and 髮逆 for the Taiping are ubiquitous in the period literature and in modern accounts; I have not traced either to a datable first use, and the claim made here is only that both were in general currency, which is not disputed. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship and credited where it carries weight: Evelyn Rawski's *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* for the literacy estimates of thirty to forty-five per cent of males and two to ten per cent of females, for the teacher-supply argument, and for the density of private

and charitable schools — with Ho Ping-ti's substantially lower estimate of ten to twenty per cent noted, since the dispute is real and unresolved; Mark Elvin's "Female Virtue and the State" and Susan Mann on the *jingbiao* system and the judgement that canonisation had become an assembly line by 1845; Janet Theiss on the eighteenth-century chastity cases; Dong Jiazun's 1937 statistics for the Song, Yuan and Ming counts of canonised women, which are a starting point rather than a settled series and are drawn from dynastic histories whose compilers had their own reasons for counting; Mark Elliott's *The Manchu Way* for *guoyu qishe*, for the argument that garrison life rather than the conservative campaign preserved Manchu identity, and for the figure of more than 12,200 banner widows canonised under Qianlong at a six-fold increase over 1644–1735; and the scholarship on banner schools and bilingual textbooks, including the study of the 1899 *Chongkan Qingwen jiezi deng shu* compilation, for the curriculum. Lu Xun's remark on what the Chinese of 1645 actually rose over, and his story *Storm in a Teacup*, are cited from secondary accounts and by title rather than quoted. Two figures should be treated with particular caution. The claim that general compliance with the queue order took about a decade of martial enforcement circulates widely and I have not found a rigorous basis for it; it is plausible and is offered as such. The death of Sun Zhixie and his family in a Shandong rising in 1647 is attested in the biographical databases as to the year, but the attribution to him of the proposal to reimpose the queue order is traditional and contested, and nothing in this module rests on it. Finally, the account of the ritual year above is composite — drawn from the general literature on late imperial popular religion and lineage practice rather than from any one locality's gazetteer — and local variation was very great; it should be read as a description of the common shape rather than of anywhere in particular.

MODULE 5

TWO DAYS' WAGE

Module 5 · The cost column — what the emperor actually took from an ordinary man, what somebody else took, what he got back, where he could have gone instead, and why he went out to the fields

What the emperor took

Start with the smallest number in this study, because everything else in the module is an attempt to explain it.

In 1712 the Kangxi emperor fixed the empire's direct tax revenue permanently, at a ceiling of roughly thirty million silver taels a year. A wear-and-tear surcharge of about twelve per cent was subsequently allowed on top, bringing the direct tax to something near thirty-three and a half million. Over the following century and a half the population and the cultivated acreage both grew substantially and the ceiling held.

Kent Deng has worked out what that meant per head, and the figure is startling. By the 1880s the land-and-poll tax came to about 0.08 taels per person per year. Set against Sidney Gamble's wage series for unskilled labourers in Beijing — five to eight hundredths of a tael a day in the slack season, nine to fifteen in the busy one — that is between one and two days' pay. Add the salt levy, which was the largest indirect tax, and the transit surcharge introduced in the 1850s, and the whole annual burden of the imperial state on an ordinary subject came to somewhere between one and a half and three days' wages. Deng's estimate is that the Qing state's share of the empire's product ran at one to five per cent.

The apparatus that collected it was correspondingly small. The entire officialdom on the government payroll numbered fewer than twenty-seven thousand men, and grew by less than ten per cent between 1700 and 1850 while the population grew twenty-five times faster; the ratio of population to officials was something like fifteen thousand to one, and to county magistrates about two hundred and fourteen thousand to one. The central government in Beijing employed around two and a half thousand people.

The reach into daily life was thinner still. A county court typically sat on two open days a month for about six months of the year, taking at most two hundred cases a day — a theoretical maximum of some twenty-four hundred cases annually for a jurisdiction of two hundred thousand people. There was no imperial police force on the ground at all. The mutual-responsibility groupings, the *lijia* and *baojia*, were self-financed and self-regulated, and Qing law explicitly forbade the deployment of village guards for official purposes. The state's tentacles, in Deng's phrase, stopped at the village gate.

So the first thing to establish about the cost column of an ordinary Qing subject is that the *state* was almost not in it.

What somebody else took

Now the number that was in it.

A tenant farmer in the Yangzi delta paid his landlord something between forty and fifty per cent of the harvest. On the Kong family's manors at Qufu — the largest private estate in the empire, held by the descendants of Confucius — share tenancy stipulated a straight fifty-fifty split of output between tenant and landlord.

Set the two figures beside each other and the whole political shape of late imperial China comes into focus. The emperor took one to two days' wages a year. The landlord took half the crop. And the Qing state, having shifted the tax burden onto property owners who paid out of their rent receipts, upheld and enforced the landlord's right to collect.

Between the two sat a third party who has been left out of most accounts and should not be. The grain tribute — the stipend rice shipped up the Grand Canal to feed the capital's officials and soldiers — was legally fixed at about four million *shi* a year from eight provinces, and it was collected not by officials but by village gentry under what amounted to tax farming: deliver the four million and no questions asked. Deng's reading of the sources is that at least ten million *shi* were actually collected, and the difference stayed in the countryside. A report to the throne in the 1830s put the average profit of a village gentleman handling the collection at around a hundred taels a year — the annual salary of a minister in Beijing — with extreme cases in the thousands for men who never touched a grain.

The cheapness of the Qing state was purchased by delegating collection to men who charged their own margin, and the margin was several times the state's own take. That is not a scandal at the edge of the system. It is the system, and it is the reason a peasant's grievances were overwhelmingly local: the man who came to his threshing floor with a measure was not the emperor's servant but his neighbour's.

What he got back

Which brings the module to the half of the ledger that gets least attention and that this order filled unusually well.

Peace. From the suppression of the Three Feudatories in 1681 and the fall of Taiwan in 1683 to the White Lotus rising of 1796, China proper went more than a century without a general war on its soil. The generation that experienced the beginning of that period had lived through the collapse of the Ming, the rebel armies of Li Zicheng and Zhang Xianzhong, the conquest, the massacres in the delta, the depopulation of Sichuan, and the clearance of the coast. Against that baseline, a hundred and thirteen years of not being killed is not a small entry in a ledger. It is the largest one.

A tax that could not rise, and then a tax the poorest stopped paying at all. The 1712 freeze was announced in a formula that entered the year-end statistical summaries for the next two decades: the new population were to be called *the proliferating people of a flourishing age*, and the tax was never to be applied to them — 盛世滋生人丁，永不加賦. More consequential still was what followed. The poll tax, levied per adult male, had run as high as four taels in some regions and was the levy the poor evaded hardest because it fell on their bodies rather than their property. From 1723–24 the Yongzheng emperor merged it into the land tax — *tandingrumu*, the apportionment of the *ding* into the fields — having tested the reform in Guangdong from 1716 and in Sichuan, where landowners resisted it. The effect was that a man with no land paid no head tax. The poorest stratum in the empire was removed from direct taxation entirely, and the burden was shifted to the people with acres, who had been evading their share for centuries.

Remissions. The high Qing emperors made a repeated practice of forgiving taxes on a scale that has struck modern fiscal historians as difficult to justify in revenue terms: Kangxi's universal land-tax remission announced in 1710 and spread across 1711 to 1713, and a series of comparable acts of munificence under his grandson.

And a granary in every county. This is the item that has no parallel anywhere in the early modern world and it deserves the space. Ever-normal granaries were established in each of the empire's thirteen hundred–odd county seats, charged with selling grain in the spring when prices rose and restocking after the autumn harvest when they fell; behind them stood community and charitable granaries run with local elite participation. National reserves between 1736 and 1779 ran at somewhere between twenty-seven and forty-one million *shi* of grain. The system reached its zenith in the 1740s to 1770s, with grain moved between provinces to meet shortfall, and it did not collapse until the mid-nineteenth-century rebellions destroyed it. Whatever else the Qing state was doing with its one to five per cent of national product, it was holding, at its peak, something like a month's grain for tens of millions of people against the possibility of a bad year.

Courts he could use, and occasionally use against his landlord. The county magistrate's court was thinly staffed and slow, but it was used, in volumes the archives document, by ordinary people over land, debt, marriage and inheritance. And the state's position on tenancy was not simply that of the landlord's enforcer: the Yongzheng emperor ruled that in the absence of a written contract of servitude a landlord had no right to a tenant's labour services, and formal liberations of tenant-serfs took place in southern Anhui in 1809 and again in 1825.

The revealed preference of the population is the strongest single piece of evidence here, and it is demographic. Between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth, China's population roughly tripled. People who conclude that their ledger comes out negative do not, in general, have that many children.

Where he could have gone

Now the dial the seed for this study flagged as the one that would be set differently from anywhere else in the corpus, and it is.

China was enormous and much of it was empty. Sichuan had been catastrophically depopulated in the wars of the 1640s, and the Qing response was not to fence anybody in but to advertise: free plots, oxen, seed, tax holidays, and official position for men who brought settlers with them. The movement is remembered by its own name — *Huguang tian Sichuan*, Huguang fills Sichuan — and it repopulated a province from Hubei, Hunan and beyond over the course of a century. The Qianlong emperor's own

explanation, in a letter to his governor-general in 1767, was simply that the jobless poor walked long distances to Sichuan because there was land and food there.

The same pattern ran elsewhere at lower intensity. Migrants crossed to Taiwan. They pushed into the southwest. They moved up into the highland margins of Hubei, Sichuan and Shaanxi, where the new American crops — maize, sweet potato — would grow on slopes that would not take rice, and lived there as *shed people*, outside most registers.

The one great frontier that was formally closed was the one the dynasty had come from. Manchuria was fenced by the Willow Palisade and covered by prohibitions on Han settlement, because it was the banner homeland and the reserve. And the closure leaked comprehensively: by the 1780s Han Chinese were farming half a million hectares of privately held land in Manchuria and made up eighty per cent of the population of its garrison towns, partly because Manchu landlords wanted Chinese tenants, partly because the Qianlong emperor, while issuing prohibition edicts from 1740 to 1776, also let drought refugees through. Jonathan Schlesinger has argued from the Manchu-language garrison archives that the coherent "policy of prohibition" historians describe was never much of a guide to local practice, and that officials on the spot cared more about poaching than about migrants.

So state the exit variable as the evidence actually supports it. **Exit was not blocked. It was steered, and steering was cheaper than trapping.** The Qing did not need a wall around the peasantry because they had somewhere to put the surplus of it, and putting a man in Sichuan with an ox was less expensive than policing him where he was and more useful than killing him. That is a fundamentally different setting from an island colony or a Nile valley, and it changes what the state has to spend to be obeyed.

Not one ledger but six

The question this module was set is why a man goes out to the fields, and the honest answer is that there was no single man. The strata had different ledgers and they behaved differently, which is exactly what the record shows.

The owner-cultivator held a transferable, defensible, heritable asset in a functioning land market with registers behind it. He paid the state a couple of days' wages a year, had standing in a court he could actually reach, and had graves in the ground that constituted his family's claim to be from somewhere. His interest was not in the Qing specifically but in there being an order at all, and any order that enforced contracts and kept bandits off

the roads would have had his compliance. He is the largest single reason the dynasty was cheap to hold.

The tenant gave up something near half his crop, and he gave it to a private person. His rent was largely fixed rather than competitively bid, which gave him security of tenure and meant he was not re-auctioned against his neighbours every season. His politics, accordingly, was rent resistance, and it was directed at his landlord — sometimes violently, often collectively, and generally without any reference to who sat in Beijing. The lower Yangzi's long history of rent and tax resistance is a history of struggles between tenants, landlords and county yamens, not of dynastic disloyalty.

The landless labourer, after 1723, paid no direct tax at all. He could move, and did. Wage work existed; the figures Gamble collected for Beijing are evidence that a labour market with seasonal rates was operating.

The bondservant on a banner estate in the metropolitan province is the one stratum in this empire whose compliance was straightforwardly coerced. He was owned, his flight was a crime, and the fugitive statutes fell not only on him but on whoever sheltered him and, in the early versions, on that person's neighbours. This is the cost column held up by naked force with an empty benefit column beside it — and the tell is that these people ran in such numbers that the state had to legislate repeatedly and savagely to stop them. The stratum was small and geographically concentrated, which is why it did not destabilise the order; but it should be named, because it is what this settlement looked like where the benefit column was genuinely empty.

The frontier migrant was being paid to be where he was.

And the people outside all of it — the shed people in the mountains, the boat populations of the southern rivers, the hereditary "mean" occupations, the non-Han of the southwest, the Muslims of the northwest — had neither the benefit column of the settled Han peasant nor the formation that made his order feel like the shape of the world.

Where the ledger was empty, the risings were

Which is the finding this module exists to produce, and it can be read directly off a map.

The White Lotus rising of 1796 to 1805 ran through the mountain margins where Hubei, Sichuan and Shaanxi meet — shed-people country, recent migrants, thin lineages,

no gentry to speak of, no granary within reach. The great simultaneous unrests of the 1850s to 1870s break down the same way: the Miao in central Guizhou, the Muslims of the northwest and of Yunnan, the Nian in the northern Anhui borderlands, and the Taiping beginning in eastern Guangxi — a frontier province of recent Han migration, Hakka–Punti feuding, and marginal upland settlement. In Deng's summary of the period the only regions entirely free of rising were Tibet, Mongolia and Manchuria, which were not administered from Beijing as provinces at all.

And in the two hundred years from 1644 to 1844 there was no mass tax rebellion in the rural Han core.

That is not because the core was better policed. It was policed hardly at all. It is because in the core the ledger came out the way this module has described: a trivial state exaction, a heavy private one against a party the peasant could fight without treason, a real benefit column of peace and grain and a frozen quota, an exit that was subsidised rather than blocked, and a formation installed in childhood that made the arrangement look like the way the world is. Where any two of those failed at once, men rose; and they rose in the places where all four were weakest.

Reading the cost column against the framework

Where the surplus is extracted privately and the state's own cut is trivial, the state receives the compliance and the intermediary receives the hatred — and this is the cheapest arrangement in the corpus. The Qing took one to two days' wages a year from a subject who was giving up half his crop to a landlord and a further large multiple of the state's take to a village gentleman farming the grain tribute. The peasant's ledger was dominated, overwhelmingly, by extractions the emperor did not receive; and the emperor's apparatus then stood behind those extractions and enforced them. **The instruction is to ask, in every case, who physically takes the crop, because the ledger is kept against that man** — and an order that has arranged for somebody else to do the taking has bought a loyalty it never paid for. The corollary is a liability the study will need later: a state that collects through intermediaries at a fraction of what the intermediaries collect has no fiscal reserve, and when it needs one it will find that the money in the countryside is already spoken for by people it does not command.

Exit does not have to be blocked. It can be steered, and steering is cheaper than trapping. Every previous case in this collection has closed on a specific fact — a

geography, a pass law, a register, a coastline — that made the order a trap rather than a contract. This one does not, and the difference has to be stated rather than smoothed over. The Qing subsidised movement into Sichuan with land, oxen, seed and tax holidays; tolerated it into Taiwan, the southwest and the highlands; and formally closed only the frontier they wanted for the banner caste, where the closure leaked until Han were eighty per cent of the towns. **So before reading a population's failure to flee as evidence of a trap, establish whether the state has supplied a destination.** A conqueror with an empty province is holding a card that a conqueror with a bounded territory does not have, and he can spend it instead of spending force.

The benefit column is not rhetoric and can be itemised, priced, and tested against behaviour. Peace from 1683 to 1796; a revenue ceiling fixed in 1712 and held for a century; the head tax abolished for the landless from 1723; ever-normal granaries in thirteen hundred county seats holding twenty-seven to forty-one million *shi*; courts that heard commoners and occasionally freed tenant-serfs. **The test of whether such a column is real is not what subjects said but what they did, and the two usable measures are fertility and migration.** A population that roughly triples over two centuries while declining to rise against the throne has entered a verdict, and it is not a verdict about the dynasty's virtue — it is a verdict about a ledger.

And rebellion locates where the ledger is empty, not where extraction is heaviest. The Qing risings are not in Jiangnan, the most heavily taxed and most intensively rented region of the empire. They are in the uplands, the ethnic frontiers, the recent-migration zones and the marginal river worlds — places with no granary, no lineage, no gentry mediator, no subsidised destination, and no formation. **Map the risings against the benefit column rather than against the tax rate, and expect them to fall where the settlement seated nobody.**

A caveat, stated because the figures in this module come mostly from one strong-thesis scholar. Kent Deng reads the ultra-low tax regime as the product of a "state–peasant alliance" and of a genuine Confucian moral restraint on rent-seeking, enforced in the last resort by the standing threat of rebellion. His arithmetic is careful and is the best available; his interpretive frame is contested and this study does not adopt it. The same numbers support a colder reading: a state that never conducted an empire-wide land survey, taxed the Qing on Ming registers that were hopelessly out of date, employed twenty-seven thousand men to govern four hundred million, could not police a single village, and farmed out its grain collection to men who took two and a half times what it

received, was not necessarily *restraining* itself. It may simply have been unable to do otherwise, and have made a virtue of a limit. Both readings fit the evidence exactly, they differ only in what they attribute to the will of the rulers, and nothing in this study requires choosing between them yet. What can be said without choosing is that the arrangement worked, that it worked for two centuries, and that it left the state with no capacity to raise more when the century of peace ended.

A note on sources. This module quotes one primary formula in the original — 盛世滋生人丁，永不加賦, the 1712 designation of the new population as the proliferating people of a flourishing age never to be taxed — and the Chinese is taken from secondary scholarship citing the *Veritable Records*, not from an edition. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship and is credited where it carries weight. The great majority of the fiscal figures come from Kent Deng's *Ultra-low Tax Regime in Imperial China, 1368–1911* (LSE Economic History Working Paper 324, 2021), which itself draws principally on Liang Fangzhong's dynastic data series: the 1712 ceiling of about thirty million taels, the twelve per cent wear-and-tear surcharge bringing the total to about 33.7 million, the per capita figure of 0.08 taels, the wage benchmark from Sidney Gamble's series for Beijing labourers, the estimate of one to five per cent of national product, the official headcounts and ratios, the county court's two open days a month, the prohibition on deploying village guards officially, and the grain tribute figures of four million *shi* legally due against at least ten million actually collected with village gentry netting around a hundred taels a year. Deng's interpretive frame is flagged in the text as contested; two further cautions belong here. His account of the Yuan period is polemical — including a claimed genocide and an attributed declaration by Khubilai — and none of it is used or endorsed above. His narrative of 1644, in which Wu Sangui invited sixty thousand Manchu cavalry as mercenaries and the Manchus then breached a contract, compresses a sequence this study has reconstructed differently and is likewise not used. The granary figures — ever-normal granaries in each of more than thirteen hundred county seats, national stocks of twenty-seven to forty-one million *shi* between 1736 and 1779, and the zenith of the system in the 1740s to 1770s — are from Pierre-Étienne Will and R. Bin Wong, *Nourish the People: The State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650–1850*, and from the scholarship built on it. The rent figures of forty to fifty per cent of the harvest in the Yangzi delta, and the fifty-fifty share tenancy on the Kong family manors, are from the secondary literature on late imperial tenancy and should be treated as regional rather than national; rents varied enormously by crop, region and contract type, and the shift from share to fixed rent over the Qing changed who bore the

risk of a bad year. On *tandingrumu*, the reform's testing in Guangdong from 1716 and in Sichuan, the resistance of landowners, the exemption of the landless and the observation that the poll tax had reached four taels in places are from standard reference accounts; the rollout was gradual and provincial, not a single act, and any date given for it is a simplification. On Manchuria, the figures of half a million hectares farmed by Han and eighty per cent Han population in garrison towns by the 1780s are James Reardon-Anderson's, and Jonathan Schlesinger's 2021 argument that the "policy of prohibition" was not a coherent guide to local governance is noted because it materially qualifies the standard account of a closed frontier. The Qianlong letter of 1767 to his Sichuan governor-general is quoted from a secondary paraphrase and not from the original. Finally, the claim that there was no mass rural tax rebellion in the Han core between 1644 and 1844 is Deng's and is doing real work in the argument above; it depends on what counts as a mass rebellion and on excluding the local rent and tax riots that were in fact common, and it should be read as a statement about scale rather than about quiescence.

MODULE 6

THE QUOTA AND THE SURPLUS

Module 6 · Extraction — a land tax frozen for a century, a monopoly on the salt of four hundred million people, a customs house run by the emperor's own bondservants, the ginseng and pearls and sable and jade of half a continent, and the rule that governed all of it: whatever came in above the number belonged to whoever collected it

One architecture, four times over

The Qing extracted wealth through what looks at first like four unrelated systems — a land tax, a grain tribute, a set of commodity monopolies, and a customs regime. They are the same system, and once the shape is visible in one it is visible in all of them.

In each case the state fixed a number. That number went up the formal channel, was recorded, was audited, and constituted the empire's revenue. And in each case something else — usually a great deal more — was collected above the number, and did not go up the formal channel at all. Where it went instead is the whole distributive question of the dynasty, and the answers differ instructively by sector: to the county clerk, to the village gentleman, to the salt commissioner, and — at the top of the chain, in the most lucrative sectors, through men who belonged to the conquest caste — to the emperor personally, into an account the Board of Revenue was not permitted to see.

This module follows the money through each channel and then asks where it came out.

Land: the number that could not rise

The land and poll tax was the state's largest formal revenue and it was deliberately made incapable of growth. The ceiling fixed in 1712 held at around thirty million taels for a century and a half, while the population and the cultivated acreage both rose substantially; the head tax was folded into the land tax from the 1720s and disappeared as

a separate levy, taking the landless out of direct taxation altogether. The consequence, traced in the previous module, was that the imperial state's take from an ordinary subject fell to something like one or two days' wages a year.

What could rise was the surcharge. Silver paid in as scattered lumps had to be melted and recast into standard ingots, and the melting fee — *haoxian* — was the recognised place where a magistrate made up the difference between his official salary of forty-five taels and the actual cost of running a county with a private staff he paid himself. By the early eighteenth century the surcharge was universal, unregulated, and in some places enormous.

The Yongzheng emperor's response is the most serious fiscal reform of the dynasty and its logic is worth stating exactly, because it is an attempt to solve the problem this whole module describes. *Haoxian guigong* — the return of the melting fee to the public purse — brought the surcharge into the formal accounts at a regulated rate and used the proceeds to pay officials a supplementary allowance frankly named *yanglian yin*, silver for the nourishment of honesty. The sums involved say everything about what the formal salary had been worth: a county magistrate on a basic forty-five taels received an allowance of six hundred to a thousand; a governor-general on a hundred and eighty received fifteen to twenty thousand.

A state that must pay its senior provincial officers a hundred times their salary in a supplementary allowance, and must give that allowance a name meaning *so that you will not need to steal*, has conceded the point. The formal fiscal system was a fiction that everybody administered around, and the reform's achievement was to move one storey of the informal structure indoors. The storeys above and below it stayed where they were.

Grain: four million on the books, ten million on the ground

The stipend rice shipped up the Grand Canal to feed the capital was assessed at about four million *shi* a year from eight provinces, and it was collected not by officials but by village gentry on a tax-farming basis: deliver the quota and no questions are asked. What was actually collected appears to have been at least ten million. The difference stayed in the countryside with the men who did the collecting, at something like a hundred taels a year for an ordinary village gentleman — the annual salary of a minister in Beijing — and considerably more for the well-placed.

The canal itself is the other half of this extraction and it is easy to overlook because it does not appear as a tax. Keeping a thousand miles of waterway open, dredged, embanked and locked, and moving a grain fleet up it annually, consumed labour and revenue on a scale that dwarfed most of what the state spent on anything else except soldiers. The peasants of eight provinces paid for the capital's food twice: once in grain and once in the works that carried it.

Salt: the largest commodity monopoly on earth

Salt is the ideal object of extraction and every Chinese state since the Han had known it: everybody must buy it, nobody can make much of it, and it is produced at a small number of coastal and inland sites that can be watched.

The Qing did not design their salt system. They inherited it. The Ming had institutionalised a hereditary franchise — the *gangfa* — in 1617, fixing the number of licensed merchants in each territory, and the Qing re-established it after 1644 essentially unchanged, because a war-strapped new dynasty needed the revenue immediately and the machinery was standing there. Merchants bought certificates, *yanyin*, entitling them to lift fixed quotas of officially produced salt and sell them in designated markets. Nobody else could legally move salt at all.

The scale is difficult to overstate. The Lianghuai division alone, headquartered at Yangzhou where the Grand Canal meets the Yangtze and supplying markets across Hubei, Hunan, Henan, Anhui and Jiangxi, generated up to half the empire's entire salt revenue. The men who held its licences were overwhelmingly from Huizhou in Anhui, several hundred miles away, and by the Qianlong reign the largest of them held fortunes above ten million taels — a private fortune roughly a third the size of the imperial state's entire annual direct-tax revenue.

Now watch the quota-and-surplus structure appear. The state's formal take from salt ran at something like ten million taels a year by the 1840s — sizeable, but around a quarter of the land tax. Its real take was larger, and it came through *juanshu*: irregular "contributions" requested from the merchant associations, which were not a tax, were not assessed, appeared in no schedule, and could not be refused by men whose entire fortune consisted of a licence the state could withdraw. The court came to rely on them for campaigns, for river works, and for imperial tours. And the merchants paid, in

enormous sums, because what they were buying was the continuation of the arrangement.

The system's internal accounting was correspondingly opaque, and when it was audited the results were spectacular. The Lianghuai investigation opened in 1768 found that over the preceding two decades the salt administration had pre-drawn something over ten million taels in advance quotas, with the surplus profits unaccounted for, and the resulting prosecutions reached the salt commissioners themselves.

Customs: the emperor's man at Canton

Foreign trade was funnelled, by the arrangement consolidated in 1757, through a single port. European ships came to Canton, dealt only with a licensed guild of Chinese merchants, and paid duties assessed by an official the foreigners called the Hoppo.

The Hoppo was not an examination official. He was a Manchu and a bondservant of the imperial house, appointed personally by the emperor, and the reason is legible in the money. The regular quota of customs revenue went to the provincial treasury and into the formal accounts. The extra quota and the exactions above it went directly to the Imperial Household Department. A bondservant could be trusted to route the surplus correctly because his standing, his position and his family's position depended on the emperor and on nothing else.

What flowed through that port outward was tea and silk and porcelain; what flowed inward, for most of the eighteenth century, was silver, in quantities that made China the terminus of the world's bullion. And then, from the last decades of the century, the flow reversed, because the traders had found a commodity the Chinese market would absorb without limit and the Qing had no instrument for stopping it. The extraction machine described in this module met, at Canton, the thing that would break it.

The emperor's own treasury

Which brings the module to its central institutional finding, and to the answer to the question of who, in this empire, had got what.

The Imperial Household Department — the *Neiwufu* — was not a department of state. It was the emperor's private establishment, staffed by bondservants of the three upper banners rather than by degree-holders, and it ran a parallel economy: the palace

workshops, the imperial silk manufactories in Jiangnan, the trade in ginseng and furs and jade, interest-bearing loans advanced to merchants through the Changlu and Lianghuai salt administrations, and — through men like the Hoppo — a substantial share of the customs. Its revenue came principally from tariffs and the salt monopoly, far exceeding what it drew from the imperial family's own landed estates. When an official in one of these networks was convicted and his property confiscated, the proceeds went not to the Board of Revenue but to the Household Department.

The crucial fact is jurisdictional. These were, in the words of one recent study of the institution, fiscal streams deliberately maintained beyond the auditing jurisdiction of the Board of Revenue. The Board audited the provinces through the *zouxiao* system, demanding detailed accounts of revenue and expenditure. It did not audit this.

So the empire had two fiscs, and the boundary between them was also the boundary of the settlement. The formal state — quota-bound, frozen since 1712, audited, staffed overwhelmingly by Han degree-holders, and small — collected the land tax and paid the soldiers and the officials. The imperial fisc — unaudited, uncapped, staffed by bondservants of the conquest caste, and drawing on the most lucrative sectors in the economy — collected the customs surplus, the salt profits, the luxury monopolies and the confiscations, and answered to one man.

The dyarchy that shared out the offices did not share out the accounts.

The fringes: ginseng, pearls, sable, jade

The fourth channel is the one that is easiest to dismiss as court luxury and should not be, because it was a monopoly system in its own right and it is where the caste logic of Qing extraction is clearest.

The court claimed rights over the high-value wild products of the frontiers it had conquered: ginseng and freshwater pearls from Manchuria, sable and other furs from the northern forests, mushrooms from the Mongolian steppe, jade from Xinjiang after 1759, copper from Yunnan. Some were held as outright monopolies, some were channelled through tribute obligations laid on frontier populations, some were licensed. All of them were, in Jonathan Schlesinger's account, matters of serious state attention: the legal precedents, the fiscal arrangements and the anxieties about crime in Manchuria, Mongolia and Xinjiang cluster around these commodities the way they cluster around land in the Chinese provinces.

And they were the making of a market. Before the Qing there was no Chinese word for marten or ermine. By 1800 Beijing shops were selling marten and ermine jackets, Mongolian steppe mushrooms and Manchurian pearls to a Chinese elite that had learned to want them, faux furs and farmed ginseng were flooding the market, and the actual resource base had been stripped — pearlers had emptied the riverbeds, fur-bearers had gone from the forests, the mushroom grounds had been uprooted. The court's response was to try to close the frontiers and let them recover, which is why the prohibition edicts and the poaching prosecutions read as they do.

One object carries the whole reach of it. In a New York museum there is a vest made entirely of Chinese coins, worked by Tlingit artisans in Alaska in the early nineteenth century. The coins were struck from Yunnanese copper, sold to shippers out of Boston, and traded on the Alaskan coast for sea otter pelts — which were carried back to Canton, to be sold to the same Chinese consumers who were buying Manchurian pearls.

What they would not extract

The refusals are as informative as the takings.

The Qing were generally reluctant to permit mining, and the reason was not economic. A mine assembles several hundred unregistered men, mostly young and mostly armed with tools, in a remote place, under a boss, outside any lineage and outside the reach of a magistrate who has two open court days a month. That is a description of a rebellion in embryo, and the court knew it. The great exception is Yunnan copper, which the state could not do without because the coinage depended on it, and which accordingly became an enormous licensed industry under close official supervision — and Yunnan is also where some of the dynasty's worst frontier disorders occurred.

The same logic governed the sea. Confining foreign trade to one port and one guild forwent an unknown but large amount of revenue that a more open regime would have produced. What it bought was that every foreign ship, every foreign merchant and every silver payment passed a single point where the state could see it.

A state that is nervous about concentrations of men will leave money in the ground, and its refusals to extract mark the places where the revenue would have created a rival.

Labour

On forced labour the answer is more limited than the comparative expectation would suggest, and the reason follows from everything above.

The old corvée obligation had been largely commuted into silver payments by the Ming Single Whip reforms and was then abolished as a separate assessment when the poll tax was folded into the land tax in the 1720s. What survived as genuine compelled labour was concentrated: the Yellow River conservancy and the Grand Canal works, which consumed enormous quantities of it; military transport on campaign; the bondservants and serfs on the banner estates of the metropolitan province, held in place by the fugitive statutes; and the tribute obligations laid on frontier peoples, which were labour in the form of pelts and pearls.

The Qing did not run a labour-extracting state because they did not need to. They had a monetised economy, an intermediary class that would do the collecting for a cut, and monopolies on goods everybody had to buy. Where those three things exist, a state has no reason to march men to a field.

Where it came out

Follow the formal revenue to its destination and the shape of the order appears one final time.

Against direct taxes of around thirty-three million taels and salt duties of about ten, the state's principal outlays were officials' wages at roughly thirteen million and soldiers' allowances at roughly twenty-eight. Something like two-thirds of the imperial budget was the floor of force. And a substantial share of that was the stipend roll of a hereditary caste that had been forbidden by law to farm, trade or practise a craft — an ordinary bannerman drawing thirty-six taels of silver and five *shi* of rice a year, in perpetuity, for being enrolled.

So the empire's formal extraction was, in the end, an arrangement for moving grain and silver from Chinese cultivators, through Chinese intermediaries who took a multiple of the state's own cut, into the pay of an army most of which was also Chinese, with the hereditary conquest caste drawing its share as a fixed charge on the whole. And running alongside it, invisible to the accounts, a second stream flowed from the salt monopoly,

the customs house and the frontier commodities, through the hands of bondservants, into a treasury that belonged to one family.

Reading extraction against the framework

Where a state fixes its formal revenue and cannot audit the difference, extraction does not stop; it relocates to whoever stands between the state and the taxpayer, and its size is set by that person's position rather than by the state's need. This is the single structure that organises Qing extraction from top to bottom: a land tax frozen in 1712 with an unregulated melting-fee surcharge above it; a grain tribute of four million *shi* with ten million actually collected; a salt licence with unassessed "contributions" above it; a customs quota with an uncapped surplus above it. **The instruction for any case is to find the quota, and then find who keeps the overage — because the second question, not the first, tells you how the empire's income was actually distributed.** It also predicts the political texture: where the overage is large and local, the subject's grievance is against the collector rather than the throne, and the throne gets the compliance without paying for it.

Two fiscs, and the boundary between them is the boundary of the settlement. The corpus has not previously had a case where the conquering house ran a private treasury alongside the state's. The Qing did, and its jurisdictional insulation was the point: the *zouxiao* audit reached the provinces and did not reach the Imperial Household Department, whose revenues came from the customs and salt networks, whose staff were bondservants of the banners rather than degree-holders, and into which the confiscated estates of disgraced officials flowed. **Where an order has more than one treasury, establish whether the line between them is also a caste line, and read the unaudited one as the settlement's real terms** — because the audited fisc is what the conquered elite was allowed to administer, and the unaudited one is what the conquerors kept.

A state's refusals to extract mark the points where the revenue would have created a rival. The Qing forwent mining revenue almost everywhere, and confined the whole of European trade to one port and one guild, at obvious cost. Neither decision is explicable in fiscal terms and both are immediately explicable as answers to the problem of capable men gathering out of sight. **So read the extraction map together with the map of what was left in the ground, and treat the second as evidence about what the apex was afraid of.**

And where a state can stop taxing bodies, look for the chokepoint it is taxing instead. The card holds that an invented head tax is the tell of a thin fiscal substrate — a conqueror with nothing to assess falls back on counting people. The Qing supply the inverse and it deserves naming: a dynasty that abolished its poll tax outright in the 1720s and froze its land tax in perpetuity was not being generous with a full purse, it was standing on a different kind of revenue altogether — a monopoly on a mineral every one of four hundred million people had to buy, a single customs gate, and the wild produce of a conquered frontier. **Assessment taxes bodies and land, which are visible, resented, and politically expensive; monopoly taxes a transaction, which is invisible, priced into the good, and blamed on the merchant.** An order that has secured a chokepoint on salt can afford to be conspicuously merciful about land, and will be, and will be praised for it.

The liability, for later. An empire whose formal revenue is frozen by an ancestor's edict, whose real revenue is dispersed among intermediaries it does not command, whose most elastic income comes through a single southern port, and two-thirds of whose budget is a floor of force it cannot reduce, has no fiscal reserve whatever. It can meet an ordinary year indefinitely and cannot meet an extraordinary one at all. When the extraordinary year came, the state invented a new tax in a provincial emergency in 1853 and let the provinces collect it — and what that did to the relationship between the centre and the men who now had their own revenue is a question for the account of how this order changed.

A note on sources. This module quotes no primary text and names three technical terms in the original where the term is the concept: *haoxian* and *haoxian guigong* for the melting fee and its return to the public purse, *yanglian yin* for the allowance for the nourishment of honesty, *gangfa* and *yanyin* for the hereditary salt franchise and the salt certificate, and *juanshu* for the irregular merchant contributions. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship. The fiscal aggregates — the direct-tax ceiling of about thirty million taels rising to 33.7 with the surcharge, salt revenue of about ten million taels in the 1840s, officials' wages of about thirteen million, soldiers' allowances of about twenty-eight million, and the bannerman's thirty-six taels plus five *shi* — are Kent Deng's in his *Ultra-low Tax Regime in Imperial China*, as are the *yanglian* figures for magistrates and governors-general and the grain-tribute figures of four million *shi* legally due against at least ten million collected; his interpretive frame is contested and is not adopted here. On salt, Yulian Wu's *Luxurious Networks* supplies the account of the Ming *gangfa* of 1617 being re-established by the Qing after 1644, the Huizhou

merchants' control of the Lianghuai and Liangzhe zones, and Lianghuai's generating up to half of all salt revenue; the claim that individual Qianlong-era salt fortunes exceeded ten million taels comes from the secondary literature and should be treated as an order of magnitude rather than a figure. The 1768 Lianghuai investigation is described here only in outline, from a Chinese popular account of the case; its details, including the figure of over ten million taels in pre-drawn quotas, should be verified in the specialist literature before any weight is placed on them. On the Imperial Household Department, the account rests on Preston Torbert's study of the institution and on the recent work on its late-Qing fiscal role, from which the characterisation of its revenues as streams deliberately kept outside the Board of Revenue's auditing jurisdiction is drawn; the observations that its income came principally from tariffs and salt rather than land rents, that its bondservants staffed most of the tariff and salt administrations under Qianlong, that it lent at interest through the Changlu and Lianghuai administrations, and that confiscated property flowed to it, are from that literature. The description of the Hoppo as a Manchu bondservant appointed personally by the emperor, with the regular quota going to the provincial treasury and the surplus to the Household Department, follows Torbert. On the frontier commodities, Jonathan Schlesinger's *A World Trimmed with Fur* supplies the account of ginseng, pearls, sable, mushrooms, jade and copper as objects of monopoly and tribute, the absence of Chinese words for marten and ermine before the Qing, the exhaustion of the resource base by around 1800, and the Tlingit coin vest in the American Museum of Natural History. The characterisation of Qing mining policy as restrictive for reasons of public order is the standard reading and is stated here without a specific citation; it should be checked, and the Yunnan copper industry in particular has a substantial literature this module has not engaged. The Canton system's consolidation in 1757 and the Cohong's monopoly are given in outline only, and the reversal of the silver flow is stated without figures because the quantitative literature on it is contested and belongs to the account of the dynasty's later crisis rather than here.

MODULE 7

NOT ONE WORD OF PROPOSAL

Module 7 · Information and suppression — a stone carved in every school in the empire forbidding the lowest degree-holders to speak, a locked leather box that made officials strangers to one another, and a dynasty that killed over history and left theology alone

The stone in the schoolyard

In the ninth year of Shunzhi — 1652 — the Board of Rites promulgated a text to every prefecture, department and county in the empire, to be cut in stone and set up in the Hall of Illustrious Ethics of the local school where the licentiates studied. It was called the *woben*, the reclining tablet. Copies were still being recut in county schools two centuries later; one raised in Yilan in 1881 survives.

Its opening is emollient. The court establishes schools and selects licentiates, remits their grain levy, provides them stipends, appoints instructors, and requires the yamens to treat them with courtesy — all in order to raise up worthy men for the state's use. Eight clauses follow. Six are unobjectionable moral instruction: honour your parents, aspire to be a loyal official, keep your heart upright, do not court the powerful, respect your teacher, avoid the yamen and do not meddle in other men's lawsuits.

The seventh and eighth are the module.

軍民一切利病，不許生員上書陳言，如有一言建白，以違制論，黜革治罪 — *On all matters of benefit and harm to soldiers and to the people, licentiates are not permitted to submit writings setting out their views. If there is so much as one word of proposal, it shall be judged a contravention of the regulations, and he shall be stripped of his degree and punished.*

生員不許糾黨多人，立盟結社，把持官府，武斷鄉曲；所作文字，不許妄行刊刻 — *Licentiates are not permitted to gather parties of many men, to swear leagues and form associations, to lay hold of the yamen, or to lord it over the countryside; and the writings they compose may not be recklessly printed.*

Read the three prohibitions together and they are a complete apparatus: you may not petition, you may not organise, you may not publish. And they are aimed with precision at one class of person — the *shengyuan*, the entry-level degree-holder, of whom there were several hundred thousand in the empire. This was the largest literate group in China, the class formed by the examination curriculum but seated nowhere, the men with the standing to be listened to and no office to lose. It was also the class that had produced the Restoration Society and the political agitation of the late Ming, and the class that would gather at the Confucian temple in Suzhou in 1661 to lament a magistrate's exactions and see eighteen of its number executed for it.

One further fact reframes the whole instrument. The Qing did not invent it. Zhu Yuanzhang had issued a *woben* of his own, containing the principle in its baldest form: on the benefits and ills of the realm all persons are permitted to speak plainly — only licentiates are not. The Manchus inherited the muzzle along with the examinations, the magistracy and the tax registers, and they re-cut it in stone.

The channel narrows

Men in office could still memorialise, and the censorate still existed. What changed under the Qing was not the right to speak but the architecture through which speech travelled, and the change is easy to mistake for a reform in the opposite direction.

Under the inherited Ming system a memorial went up through the Office of Communication and the Grand Secretariat. It was copied, circulated, docketed and known. That is precisely how the great Ming remonstrances worked: an official who submitted one was addressing the throne and, simultaneously, the entire officialdom, and other men could read it, agree with it, and add their names.

The Kangxi emperor began, informally, to let selected functionaries write to him directly. These palace memorials — *zouzhe* — bypassed the Office of Communication entirely. They had to be written by the sender in his own hand. They travelled in specially made leather boxes, sealed, by courier. The emperor answered in vermilion in the margin and sent them back. In the last thirteen years of Kangxi's reign the throne received something like twenty-five hundred of them.

The Yongzheng emperor made the channel the system. He extended eligibility to over a thousand officials, formalised the procedure, and — from 1729, with the Grand Council established beside the throne to process the traffic — built the whole executive

apparatus of the empire around a document nobody but the sender and the emperor ever saw. By the Qianlong reign the palace memorial had displaced the routine memorial as the principal instrument of government.

Every account of this treats it, correctly, as an information-*gathering* triumph: an emperor with a thousand private correspondents in the provinces, hearing about a flood or a defalcation or a rice price before the bureaucracy could compose itself. It is also, and this is the part usually left out, one of the most effective suppression instruments in the record, and it works without banning anything.

What the palace memorial destroyed was lateral knowledge. An official who wrote to Yongzheng did not know what his colleague in the next province had written, or whether the man across the table at the Board agreed with him, or whether his own criticism was one voice or fifty. He could not read the file. He could not add his name to another man's protest because he could not see it. And he had to assume that his colleagues were writing about *him*, because they were: the system explicitly invited mutual report.

A collective remonstrance requires officials to know each other's minds. The Ming's did, ruinously and often. The Qing's could not, and no edict had to forbid it.

What they actually prosecuted

Now the prosecutions, and here the expectation with which this study began turns out to be wrong in an instructive direction.

An order of this kind might be expected to police doctrine — to hunt heresy, regulate the classics, prosecute unorthodox readings of the canon. The Qing did essentially none of that. What they prosecuted, over and over, for a century and a half, was *history*.

The first great case was about a book of history and nothing else. Zhuang Tinglong, a wealthy man of Huzhou in Zhejiang, published a private history of the Ming around 1660. Its offences, as enumerated: it used the Ming emperors' reign titles and Ming forms; it referred to the Manchus and the Jianzhou Jurchens as barbarians; it referred to Qing emperors by their personal names; and it denied the Qing's legitimacy. The investigation ran from 1661 to 1663 and ended with more than seventy people executed — eleven of the fourteen men who had worked on the revision died by slicing — and over a thousand punished. The prosecution reached the whole supply chain: the block-

carvers, the printers, the booksellers, and the men who had merely owned a copy were beheaded. Officials who had failed to notice the book were removed.

The pattern held. Dai Mingshi was executed in 1713 over his *Nanshan Collection*, which had used Southern Ming reign titles. Zha Siting fell in 1726. Lü Liuliang, dead since 1683, had his coffin opened and his corpse mutilated in the 1730s for writings that denied a barbarian could hold the mandate. Wang Xihou was executed in 1777 over a dictionary. The compiled archive of Qing literary cases runs to over two thousand three hundred recorded incidents, and they cluster heavily in the Qianlong reign.

Set the list against what was *not* touched. The classics were promoted, not policed. Buddhist and Daoist establishments were patronised. Popular religion was left alone except where it organised into sects. Jesuits ran the imperial astronomical bureau. Ordinary criticism of officials was not merely permitted but institutionally solicited through the palace memorial. Commoners sued each other and occasionally their landlords in the magistrate's court. There was no index of theological error, no inquisition into what men believed about Heaven, no requirement of confession.

This dynasty killed people over the record of its own origin and left the content of belief substantially free. And the reason is the one the previous module on legitimacy established: a conqueror who has borrowed the conquered order's entire doctrine cannot police that doctrine, because it is not his — every text is theirs, every commentator is theirs, and the canon arms both sides. What is his, and his alone, is the account of how he came to hold it. So that is what he defends, and he defends it with the only instrument available, which is terror applied to authors, printers and owners.

The greatest library was a search

The culminating instrument is also the most admired object the dynasty produced, and the two facts are the same fact.

The Qianlong emperor commissioned the *Siku Quanshu* — the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries — in 1772. Over ten years, a board of more than three hundred and sixty scholars under Ji Yun and Lu Xixiong, with some three thousand eight hundred scribes copying every character by hand, assembled around three and a half thousand titles into a collection of thirty-six thousand volumes and near a billion characters, with an annotated catalogue describing over ten thousand works. It is the largest collectanea in

the Chinese tradition and one of the great acts of preservation in any civilisation. Many texts survive only because of it.

To assemble it, the court had to find out what books existed. Provincial officials were ordered to locate and collect, and owners of rare works were encouraged to send them in.

At first almost nobody did, because everyone understood what a comprehensive inventory of privately held books was for. So at the end of 1772 the emperor issued a decree: the books would be returned to their owners when the work was finished, and no owner would be punished if his books turned out to contain anti-Manchu material. Within three months four or five thousand books had been handed in.

They were then sorted into three categories: copied into the collection, subjected to partial excision — *chouhui* — or destroyed entirely, *quanhui*. The works marked for annihilation were overwhelmingly late Ming writings that denounced the Manchus or spoke well of the Southern Ming courts. Provincial registers of the proscribed survive from Zhejiang and Henan. The total destroyed is not securely known and the estimates vary widely, which is itself a comment on the thoroughness of the operation.

And it worked, measurably. A recent quantitative study tracking over a hundred and sixty thousand book publications from the 1660s to the 1940s finds that the categories subjected to heavier proscription show a marked decline in publication across the seven decades after the bans, and that publication in those categories only revived from the 1840s, as the state's grip weakened.

A comprehensive survey of a civilisation's writing is the necessary precondition for suppressing part of it, and the collection instrument was an amnesty the state did not intend to honour.

The seam, in a different plane

The question this module was set — how much effort an order puts into keeping information from reaching the place its legitimacy is manufactured — has no straightforward answer here, because there is no metropole. The Qing court was in Beijing from 1644. There was no distant taxpaying public whose belief funded the conquest and whose ignorance had to be maintained.

But there was a seam, and it ran in a different plane: between the languages, and between the archive and the record.

The Qing kept a parallel documentary universe in Manchu — the early chronicles, the Manchu veritable records, the Manchu-language memorials, the garrison archives — which the Chinese officialdom did not read and largely could not. And when the dynasty came to compile the official *History of the Ming*, the compilers did not draw on the *Ming Veritable Records* for the sections dealing with the Jurchen, because those records document what the dynasty most needed removed: that Nurhaci's grandfather and father had held Ming patents, that Nurhaci himself held the Ming title of Dragon-Tiger General, that he sent tribute embassies to Beijing as late as 1615. The Yongzheng emperor went further and argued that the Aisin Gioro had never been anyone's subjects, explaining away the Ming title as something his ancestor had accepted to please Heaven.

That is the same operation a colonial order performs on its metropole, run inward instead of outward. What is being kept from view is not a massacre but a genealogy — and the class it is being kept from is the one that reads.

Reading suppression against the framework

An order conceals what its legitimacy rests on, not what discredits it — and the map of its prosecutions is therefore a map of its load-bearing claim. The Qing left doctrine, religion, science and the criticism of officials substantially alone, and killed over reign titles, the word *barbarian*, private histories of the Ming, and the record of the Aisin Gioro's service to the dynasty they replaced. Nothing else in this study identifies the dynasty's real foundation so precisely. **The instruction generalises: catalogue what an order prosecutes, sort it by category, and the largest category is what the order believes it cannot survive being examined.** And the corollary the Qing supply: **where the robe is borrowed, the prosecutions will be historical rather than doctrinal**, because a conqueror using the conquered's creed cannot litigate the creed, and the only thing that is properly his is the story of the acquisition.

Where an order faces a large formed class of aspirants it will regulate standing to speak rather than the content of speech, because a standing rule is self-enforcing and a content rule requires readers. The stone of 1652 did not list forbidden opinions. It named a class of person and removed from them, at one stroke, the three capacities a political movement requires: petition, association, publication. It was cut in the building where they were formed, it required no censor, and it left a licentiate's every utterance actionable without anyone having to decide whether it was seditious. **Look, in any order**

with a surplus of credentialled and unseated men, for a rule of standing rather than a rule of content, and expect to find it early, cheap and durable.

A private channel to the sovereign is a public silence among his servants. This is the finding this module contributes that the corpus does not have. The palace memorial system is universally and rightly described as an instrument for getting information *to* the throne, and it was superb at that. But every confidential channel that runs from many senders to one recipient destroys the senders' knowledge of one another, and collective action among officials requires exactly that knowledge. The Ming's officials could read each other's memorials and coordinate; the Qing's could not, and no prohibition was needed to prevent it. **So when a study finds a ruler building a confidential reporting system, it should count what the system dissolves as carefully as what it delivers — and expect the disappearance of collective remonstrance to follow within a generation, unlegislated.**

And the largest act of cultural preservation an order performs may be the same operation as its largest act of destruction. You cannot proscribe what you have not inventoried, and the *Siku Quanshu* was, in one motion, the greatest bibliographic achievement in Chinese history and the mechanism by which the empire's private libraries were opened for inspection. **The diagnostic: where an order undertakes a comprehensive survey of its own culture, ask what the survey enabled, and examine the collection instrument — because a state that must promise an amnesty to obtain the material has told you what the material was wanted for.** The honest balance has to be held, and this study will not resolve it: the same project destroyed an unknown number of books and is the reason a great many others exist to be read.

A note on sources. This module quotes one primary text in the original, and it is the load-bearing evidence: the seventh and eighth clauses of the *woben* tablet of Shunzhi 9 (1652), 軍民一切利病，不許生員上書陳言，如有一言建白，以違制論，黜革治罪 and 生員不許糾黨多人，立盟結社，把持官府，武斷鄉曲；所作文字，不許妄行刊刻. The Chinese is transcribed from the record of an extant stone — an 1881 recutting of the imperial text by the magistrate of Yilan county, held in the Taiwan Historica collections — and the English rendering is my own. This is a recut provincial copy rather than the promulgated original, and while the eight-clause text is well attested and reproduced in several Fujian and Taiwan gazetteers of the period, anyone relying on the exact wording should check it against the *Da Qing huidian* or the Board of Rites' own promulgation. The Ming antecedent — Zhu Yuanzhang's *woben* and the principle

that on the realm's benefits and ills all may speak plainly except licentiates — is noted from a secondary citation and has not been verified against an edition; nothing above depends on it beyond the observation that the instrument was inherited. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship. On the palace memorial system: the introduction under Kangxi as an informal channel bypassing the Office of Communication, the requirement of the sender's own hand, the locked leather boxes, the figure of about twenty-five hundred confidential memorials in Kangxi's last thirteen years, Yongzheng's extension of eligibility to over a thousand officials and his formalisation of the system, and the Grand Council's establishment around 1729 with its expansion by 1733, are from the standard reference and secondary literature; the inference drawn from all of this about the destruction of lateral knowledge is mine and is offered as an argument rather than as a finding of that literature. On the literary inquisition: the Zhuang Tinglong case of 1661–63, its enumerated offences, the seventy-odd executions including eleven of fourteen revisers by slicing, the punishment of carvers, printers, booksellers and owners, and the thousand-plus punished, are from the specialist literature and from Frederick Mote's and Joanna Waley-Cohen's accounts; the figure of over two thousand three hundred recorded incidents across the dynasty comes from the modern compiled archive of Qing literary cases and counts incidents of very unequal gravity. Dai Mingshi (1713), Zha Siting (1726) and Wang Xihou (1777) are named from the same literature without their case details being independently verified here. On the *Siku Quanshu*: the commission of 1772 and completion in 1782, the board of over 361 scholars under Ji Yun and Lu Xixiong, the 3,826 scribes, the roughly 3,461 titles copied and 10,680 catalogued, and the *chouhui* and *quanhui* categories are standard; the account of the 1772 decree promising the return of books and immunity for anti-Manchu content, followed within three months by four to five thousand submissions, is likewise standard and derives ultimately from the project's own records, which is a caution in itself. L. Carrington Goodrich's 1935 study and Kent Guy's *The Emperor's Four Treasuries* are the two indispensable works and both should be read before any figure for total destruction is quoted; this module deliberately gives none, because the published estimates vary by a factor of several and none of them is secure. The quantitative finding on post-ban publication decline and its recovery from the 1840s is from a recent working paper by Ying Bai, Ruixue Jia and Jiaojiao Yang analysing over 161,000 book publications, and is a working paper rather than a settled result. Finally, the point about the *Ming History* compilers declining to use the *Ming Veritable Records* for the Jurchen sections, and Yongzheng's argument that his ancestors were never

subjects, is repeated here from the account given in this study's landscape and rests on the same secondary sources; it is a claim about editorial practice that deserves verification in the specialist historiography of the *Mingshi* project before it is treated as settled.

MODULE 8

THE BOX BEHIND THE TABLET

Module 8 · Elite coordination and the default — running the chain from the throne down through the princes, the caste, the boards, the provinces and the local gentry, and asking of each man in turn whether the arrangement collapsing tomorrow would leave him better or worse off

What is actually being audited

A hierarchy that lasts is not one whose members admire one another. The men in it frequently do not: the Manchu president of a board and his Han colleague, the governor-general and the governor whose jurisdictions overlap, the magistrate and the gentleman who farms his grain tribute — these are relations of suspicion and rivalry, and the record is full of their mutual denunciations. What makes the arrangement durable is something colder and more reliable than goodwill. It is that each of these men, pursuing nothing but his own position, is thereby defending the whole structure, because his position exists only inside it.

The audit is therefore a single question asked at every link: **if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off?** Where the answer is *worse*, he will defend it without being asked, watched, or paid to. Where the answer is *better*, no amount of doctrine or surveillance will hold him for long, and the study should expect to find either an engineered substitute for the missing self-interest, or a date at which he broke.

This module runs the chain from the throne down to the local gentleman. It stops there, above the cultivator, because the common man's ledger was the previous module's business and he is not the danger. The danger is always the men one level down from whoever is holding the thing.

The apex: a problem with no good answer

Begin at the top, because the Qing had the hardest version of the succession problem available and their solution is the most interesting thing in this module.

Manchu practice before the conquest was collective. Nurhaci's informal deliberative groups of the 1610s were formalised by Hong Taiji in 1626 and expanded in 1637 into the Deliberative Council of Princes and Ministers, and it was this body of Manchu princes and senior banner nobles that chose the successor. It chose the five-year-old Fulin in 1643 as a compromise between two strong contenders, and it chose again in 1661. The arrangement had the merits of any elective monarchy among a warrior nobility: it selected for competence and it bound the electors to the outcome.

It also had the defect. If the throne is elective among the princes, every prince is a candidate and every senior banner noble is a kingmaker, and the interval around a death is a scramble in which the men with troops decide. That is a permanent standing invitation to faction, and the Kangxi emperor — who had come to the throne as a child under a regency, and had had to break Oboi at sixteen — understood it as the central danger of his own house.

So he tried the Chinese answer. In 1675 he designated his infant second son Yinreng as crown prince, breaking with Manchu practice, on the reasoning that a publicly known heir removes the contest.

It did the opposite, and the way it failed is instructive. A designated heir is a rival court. Yinreng waited thirty-three years — long enough to ask, in a phrase the sources preserve, whether there had ever been a forty-year-old crown prince — while Kangxi enfeoffed his other sons from 1698 and brought them into government, creating exactly the rival power centres a designation was supposed to prevent. Yinreng was deposed in 1708, restored in 1709, and deposed permanently in 1712, after which Kangxi named nobody at all for the last decade of his reign and the princes fought a cold war over the succession that has never been fully reconstructed. The fourth prince took the throne in 1722 with the assistance of Longkodo, who as Guardian of the Nine Gates controlled the imperial guard and the city watch, and spent the rest of his life answering accusations that he had forged his father's will.

Which brings us to the box.

In the eighth month of 1723, in the first year of his reign, the Yongzheng emperor announced a new procedure. He would choose his heir, write the name, seal the document, and place it in a box behind the tablet reading 正大光明 — *Upright and Illustrious* — hanging in the Palace of Heavenly Purity, in calligraphy attributed to the first Qing emperor to rule in Beijing. Nobody would be told. The box would be opened

when he died. Understanding that he spent most of the year at the Yuanmingyuan rather than in the Forbidden City, he had a duplicate made and kept there, and told exactly two men about it — Zhang Tingyu and Ortai — reiterating to them years later that not one other person knew.

Look at what that instrument does. It does not prevent princes from being ambitious, or officials from wanting a patron, or the court from having factions. It removes the *object* around which any of that could organise. A faction requires a candidate; a candidate requires knowledge of who is a candidate; and after 1723 nobody in the empire, including the princes themselves, knew. Every prince had to behave as though he might be the heir, which meant behaving well. Every official had to behave as though any prince might be, which meant attaching himself to none. The information a coalition needs in order to form had simply been withdrawn from circulation.

This is a genuinely distinct answer to the problem of the capable men one level down, and the corpus does not have it. The other answers on the record work on the claimants: prevent the class from forming, rotate its successes before they root, fragment the office, buy the rivals in. Secret designation leaves the claimants entirely intact, in place, capable and ambitious — and destroys the information they would need to act together. It is the cheapest instrument in this study by a wide margin: it costs a sheet of paper, a box, and the emperor's silence.

Its liabilities are equally clean. It concentrates the entire succession in one man's private judgement with no institutional check whatever; it depends on the document surviving and being found; and it produces, at every accession, a ruler whose legitimacy rests on a piece of paper that a sufficiently determined man could have substituted. Yongzheng spent his reign fighting exactly that rumour about his own accession, which is presumably why he built the system.

The princes and the caste

One link down sits the Manchu nobility, and the striking fact is that the throne dismantled its own aristocracy's collective power and the aristocracy let it.

The Deliberative Council had been the paramount body of the early Qing — deciding military campaigns, policy and succession, and powerful enough during Dorgon's regency and into Kangxi's reign that an emperor whose view conflicted with it sometimes had to give way. Kangxi began routing around it in 1677 by creating the

Southern Study, staffed with literary officials of his own choosing. Yongzheng finished the job in 1729 by creating the Grand Council beside the throne to handle the Dzungar campaign, and it never went back: within a generation the Council was the executive engine of the empire, its handful of members chosen for reliability rather than rank, sitting in an undistinguished building west of the gate to the Palace of Heavenly Purity, processing the confidential memorials nobody else saw. The Deliberative Council withered and was formally wound up before the end of the century.

Ask the audit question of a Manchu prince watching this happen. He is losing a collective veto his grandfathers had exercised over emperors. What is his alternative?

There isn't one. The princes could not combine against the throne without splitting the conquest caste, and a split conquest caste in a country of three hundred million Chinese is not a faction, it is an extinction event. Whatever a prince lost to the Grand Council, he lost to an Aisin Gioro emperor whose survival was the precondition of his own. **The most reliable defaults in this empire were held by the people with the fewest alternatives, and the Manchu nobility had none at all.**

The same holds, more starkly, further down. An ordinary bannerman drew thirty-six taels and five *shi* of rice a year for being enrolled; he was legally barred from farming, trade and craft; he could not leave his garrison without permission; he lived inside a walled quarter; and he had a separate criminal liability that turned a year's penal servitude into five days in the cangue. Every one of those is a benefit and every one is a fence. He was the most completely dependent person in the empire and the least equipped to be anything else, and that is precisely why the arrangement could treat him as it did. His default was unbreakable because his exit was unimaginable.

The first link that went negative

The Han bannerman is where the chain first fails, and the failure is instructive because the state chose it.

By 1648 fewer than one in six bannermen were of Manchu ancestry; roughly three-quarters were in the Han banners. These were the Liaodong military families who had come over before the conquest, and in the first reigns they were the empire's administrators: Han bannermen supplied the majority of provincial governors, and the Six Boards and other major positions were filled with them. Their position was excellent

and their default was solid — they held office they could not have held under a Ming, in a system that classified them as conquerors.

Then the arithmetic caught up. A hereditary caste forbidden to produce grows while its stipend roll does not, and by the middle of the eighteenth century the banner livelihood problem was acute. The court's remedy was to shrink the caste, and it shrank it at the least Manchu end: Han bannermen who had joined after 1644 were ordered out, leaving the pre-conquest Liaodong contingent. Under Qianlong the Han banners' status was downgraded and their privileges reduced.

That is the audit going negative by policy. A group whose position had been secured by the conquest was told that the position was contingent after all, and the criterion by which it was withdrawn — descent — was not the criterion by which it had been granted, which was enrolment. Nothing dramatic followed; the men expelled went into Chinese society, which was not a catastrophe for them individually. But the precedent is the thing. **The caste boundary had been shown to be adjustable by the throne according to what the throne could afford, which is a fact every remaining member could draw his own conclusions from.**

The dyarchy: why a Han minister defended a Manchu emperor

Now the central government, and the question that has puzzled every observer of this dynasty: why did the Chinese scholar-official class, which produced the men who actually ran the empire, spend two and a half centuries running it for a foreign house?

The doctrinal answer is in the module on legitimacy and it is real. The positional answer is more reliable and it is this.

The Qing ran the Six Boards with paired presidencies, Manchu and Han. They ran quotas in appointments, and the regulations governing the selection of Han officials ran to nearly three times the length of those governing Manchus. The examinations produced overwhelmingly Han graduates — something like ninety-seven per cent of the top places across the dynasty, in both the civil and the military examinations — and the Grand Council, Manchu at first, admitted Han members early, Zhang Tingyu among the first and among the most powerful men of the century.

The distribution of posts by ethnicity is contested and the available compilations are hard to read, but the shape is not in dispute: Manchus held a majority at the top of the

central civil administration and an overwhelming majority of banner military commands, while Han officials filled the enormous middle and lower reaches of the civil bureaucracy and supplied nearly all of the men the examinations produced.

Now run the audit on a Han grand secretary. He holds an office of the first rank in an empire vastly larger than the Ming, reached by an examination whose curriculum is unchanged, protected by a quota that guarantees Han men a fixed share of the senior posts, with his family's land confirmed and his degree exempting him. If the dynasty fell tomorrow, he would not become more powerful. He would be a collaborator in a country under new management, competing for a smaller number of posts with no quota to protect him, in a bureaucracy staffed by whoever had won.

The quota is the point and it is easy to miss because it looks like discrimination. A rule that reserves half the senior appointments for Manchus also reserves the other half for Han — and guarantees it, in writing, against the ordinary operation of favour. It converts a Han official's position from something he holds at the conquerors' pleasure into something the arrangement itself owes him. **A quota that limits a man also entitles him, and entitlement is what makes a default hold.**

The provinces: where the default was not trusted

At the provincial level the Qing did not rely on the audit coming out right, and the machinery they built instead is the clearest evidence in this study of where they thought the danger was.

A governor-general held two provinces; a governor held one inside his jurisdiction; both memorialised the throne separately and neither controlled the other. The rule of avoidance barred every official from serving in his home province. Postings ran three or four years and then moved. The Green Standard's provincial commands answered upward through channels that did not combine. And over all of it lay the confidential palace memorial — a locked box, written in the sender's own hand, going straight to the emperor, which meant that any provincial official had to assume his colleague was reporting on him and could never learn what his colleague had written.

Every one of those is an anti-coordination device, and together they answer a question the benefit column could not. A governor-general commanding provincial troops and revenues in a region a month's travel from Beijing genuinely would, in the right circumstances, be better off independent. That had been demonstrated: it is exactly what

happened in 1673, when three Chinese generals holding the southwest with their own armies and their own revenues rose the moment the court moved to recall them, and nearly took the empire back.

So the Qing did the two things available. They never again granted a provincial command that included its own revenue and its own army together. And they made it structurally impossible for the men who held the pieces to find each other.

Where an order cannot make a link self-defending, it engineers against coordination instead — and the anti-coordination machinery is therefore a map of the links where the default failed. Read the Qing provincial system that way and it tells you, without any need for interpretation, that the throne trusted its bannermen and its gentry and did not trust its governors.

The link that actually held the empire

Below the officials sits the class that did the real work of holding China down, and it was neither Manchu nor official.

The local gentleman — a degree-holder, often a licentiate who never got further, sometimes a retired official, frequently a landlord — occupied a position assembled out of half a dozen separate benefits, every one of which came from the state. His land was confirmed and its title enforced. His degree exempted him from labour service and corporal punishment and gave him access to the magistrate as something approaching a social equal. His rents were collected with the magistrate's backing. He arbitrated the disputes that never reached a court, ran the lineage's charitable estate and the local granary, expounded the Sacred Edict twice a month, and farmed the grain tribute at a margin that could equal a Beijing minister's salary.

And every element of that rested on a register the state maintained and could edit. In 1661 the state edited it: thousands of Jiangnan degree-holders were struck off over tax arrears, some for trivial sums, and eighteen men who had protested at the Confucian temple in Suzhou were executed. What was demonstrated was not that the state could kill gentlemen — everyone knew that — but that it could *unmake* them, administratively, in bulk, without touching their land.

Run the audit here and the answer is the most emphatic in the chain. If the arrangement collapsed tomorrow, the landlord would keep his fields under any regime

that enforced contracts. The *gentleman* would lose his exemptions, his standing, his access, his monopoly of local mediation and his cut of the tribute, all at once, because all of them are conferred rather than owned. He is bound more tightly than the man with more property, by a thinner thread, and there are hundreds of thousands of him distributed across every county in the empire.

That is the link that held China, and it cost the Qing almost nothing, because what it was paid in was status the state could issue at will.

Selling the stake

Which explains the practice that looks like simple corruption and is in fact the default's expansion mechanism.

The Qing sold degrees and minor offices. Price lists were issued in 1756 and again in 1838; ranks from the ninth up to the seventh were purchasable, along with junior county posts — registrar, assistant magistrate — and, most commonly, the studentship at the Directorate of Education that let a man skip the entry examinations and go straight to the provincial. In one year in Huizhou prefecture alone the records show twenty-nine purchases of substantive posts, three hundred and seventy-five of honorary titles, and six hundred and forty-nine studentships.

The revenue mattered, and in the crisis of the 1850s it mattered enormously. But look at what else it bought. Every purchase converted a rich man with no stake in the arrangement into a man whose status depended on it. The licentiate class grew steadily to around a million before the Taiping and peaked at something like 1.44 million after the 1850s, and by the middle of the nineteenth century as much as thirty-six per cent of licentiates had obtained the degree by donation rather than examination.

Selling admission to the settlement is the cheapest possible way to widen a default: the buyer pays for his own capture.

And it manufactures the thing that will break it. The bureaucracy could not absorb the purchasers. Expectant officials — men holding a rank and waiting for a post — accumulated in the provincial capitals for years and sometimes for good. A state that has sold a million men a stake in an arrangement and can seat only a fraction of them has produced, at its own expense, a large class of educated men who have been promised a

position and have not got one; and the difference between such a man and a rebel is not conviction but opportunity.

Where the audit came out wrong

Collect the failures and they are few, dated, and consistent.

1673. Three Chinese generals held the southwest with their own armies, their own revenues and their own appointments, in exchange for holding it. The moment the court moved to recall them, every one of them was better off outside the arrangement than inside it, and all three rose. Eight years of war followed. The Qing never repeated the terms.

The mid-eighteenth century. The Han bannermen who had joined after the conquest were expelled from the caste to relieve the stipend burden. The state chose to break a default rather than pay for it.

The nineteenth century, in embryo. The expectant official with a purchased rank and no post; the licentiate who failed four times; the frustrated aspirant in a frontier province where the examination quotas were small and the local gentry weak. Hong Xiuquan failed the entry-level examination repeatedly, and what he built in Guangxi in 1850 was not a peasant movement in its leadership but a movement of marginal literati and unseated aspirants — which is the standing pressure of a formation system that forms more men than it seats, discharging inward because there was nowhere else for it to go.

And the one still ahead. From 1853 the court authorised provincial officials to raise their own armies and, shortly after, to collect their own transit revenue to pay for them. That is the 1673 arrangement re-created, at larger scale, by a court that had no alternative — and the men who held it afterwards had every element of a governor-general's position plus the two things the Qing had spent a hundred and seventy years making sure no provincial official ever held together.

Reading the default against the framework

The strongest default is not the one that rewards most; it is the one where the alternative is not a worse position but no position at all. The two most secure links in this empire were the bannerman and the local gentleman, and neither was rich. The

bannerman had a modest stipend and a legal prohibition on every other livelihood; the gentleman had exemptions and standing that existed only in a register. Both were held not by what the arrangement gave them but by the fact that nothing outside the arrangement would give them anything. **So when auditing a chain, do not measure the size of each man's benefit — measure the distance to his next-best position, and expect the tightest links to be the ones with the shortest ladders out.**

Secret designation belongs on the menu, and it works by removing the object of coordination rather than the capacity for it. The documented answers to the problem of the capable men below all operate on the claimants themselves: prevent the class forming, rotate its members before they root, fragment the office, or buy them in. Yongzheng's instrument of 1723 does none of these. The princes remain in place, capable, adult and ambitious; what is removed is the single piece of information — *which one* — without which no coalition can form around any of them. It costs nothing, it requires no apparatus, and it transfers the entire risk onto the incumbent's judgement and the survival of one sheet of paper. **Where a study finds an apex facing rival claimants it cannot eliminate, check whether it has attacked the claimants or the information about them; the second is cheaper, rarer, and leaves no institutional trace except a procedure.**

A quota that limits a man also entitles him, and the entitlement is what makes the default hold. The Manchu–Han pairing at the boards and the reservation of appointments by ethnicity are usually read as instruments of Manchu domination, and they were. They were also the mechanism by which the conquered elite's share of office stopped being a favour and became a rule — guaranteed in writing, against the ordinary workings of patronage, for as long as the dynasty stood. **Where a conqueror installs ethnic or communal quotas, audit them from both sides: the ceiling they place on the conquered is also a floor, and a floor is a reason to defend the building.**

Where an order cannot make a link self-defending, it engineers against coordination instead, and its anti-coordination machinery is a map of the links it did not trust. The Qing left the gentry and the banner garrisons almost entirely to the default. They surrounded the provincial governors with avoidance rules, short tenures, overlapping jurisdictions, split military commands and a confidential channel that made every colleague a potential informer — because a governor-general with troops and revenue in a distant province is a man whose interest genuinely can point outward, as 1673 proved. **The instruction: locate an order's surveillance and separation**

machinery precisely, and read it as the order's own audit of where its defaults were weakest. It is more honest than any doctrine the order produced about itself.

And selling admission to the settlement widens the default at the buyer's expense while manufacturing the class that will eventually break it. Purchased degrees converted wealth into stake, raised revenue, and cost the state nothing but the issuing of status. They also produced a credentialled class far larger than the number of chairs, waiting in provincial capitals for posts that did not exist. **An order that can sell entry will sell it, especially under fiscal pressure; the sale is genuinely stabilising in the short run; and the surplus it creates is the standing pressure that will discharge outward if there is a frontier and inward if there is not.** By the 1840s the Qing frontiers were closing, the coast was in crisis, and the number of purchased degrees was rising. The fracture, when it comes, will not come from the men in the fields.

A note on sources. This module quotes one phrase in the original — 正大光明, the tablet in the Palace of Heavenly Purity behind which the sealed succession edict was kept — and it is a matter of physical fact rather than of textual reconstruction. Everything else is paraphrase from modern scholarship. On the succession: the Deliberative Council's derivation from Nurhaci's informal assemblies of the 1610s, its formalisation by Hong Taiji in 1626 and expansion in 1637, and its role in the accessions of 1643 and 1661 follow Wakeman, Bartlett and Rawski as summarised in the standard reference literature; Kangxi's designation of Yinreng in 1675 (some accounts give 1674), the depositions of 1708 and 1712, the intervening restoration of 1709, and the decade without a designated heir are not in dispute, though the internal politics of the succession struggle remain contested and the circumstances of Yongzheng's accession may never be settled. The secret designation procedure of 1723, the placing of the edict behind the tablet, the duplicate kept at the Yuanmingyuan and the confiding of its existence to Zhang Tingyu and Ortai are from the secondary literature and from the Palace Museum's own account; the detail that Yongzheng reiterated the confidence in 1732 with the remark that no other person knew comes from a popular history and should be verified before it is quoted as evidence rather than as illustration. The date of the Deliberative Council's formal abolition is given in the literature as late in the Qianlong reign and I have not verified it; the module says only that it was wound up before the end of the century. On the dyarchy: the paired presidencies, the appointment quotas, the observation that the regulations for selecting Han officials ran to nearly three times the length of those for Manchus, and the figure of roughly ninety-seven per cent Han among examination champions are from Kent Deng's compilation of Qing institutional data, which draws

on Song Yuanqiang's study of the examination champions; Deng's tabulation of officials by ethnicity across ranks is not reproduced here because its categories are difficult to interpret — the apparent rise in the Manchu share at lower ranks reflects the inclusion of banner posts — and the module states only the uncontested shape. On the provincial system, the rule of avoidance, the overlapping jurisdictions of governor-general and governor and the separate memorial channels are standard. On the gentry: Chung-li Chang's *The Chinese Gentry* remains the basic study, and from it come the estimates of roughly one million licentiates before the Taiping rising to about 1.44 million after the 1850s, and the finding that as much as thirty-six per cent held their degrees by donation by the mid-nineteenth century; the 1756 and 1838 price lists for the sale of ranks and offices, the range of purchasable ranks from ninth to seventh, and the Huizhou figures of twenty-nine posts, three hundred and seventy-five titles and six hundred and forty-nine studentships in a single year are from the secondary literature on the *juanna* system and should be treated as illustrative rather than as a series. The characterisation of the Taiping leadership as drawn from frustrated aspirants and marginal literati is stated here in outline only and is the subject of the module on collapse, where it will be tested properly rather than assumed. Finally, the argument that the palace memorial system functioned as an anti-coordination device among officials is mine and is developed in the preceding module; it is an inference from the system's structure rather than a finding of the literature on it.

MODULE 9

SIXTY-ONE NORTHERN NAMES

Module 9 · Plurality and the liberty variable — what a subject of this empire could do that the state could not simply stop, who put those things there, which of them held for five centuries and which died in a generation, and why the difference had nothing to do with how they were worded

The question, put the way it has to be put

There is a way of asking about liberty that produces nothing. It asks whether the Qing empire had freedom of speech, or the rule of law, or protections for the subject, holds the answer against a modern standard, finds it wanting, and stops.

The useful question is narrower and colder. In an order with a state apparatus, is there anything a man can do that the apparatus cannot simply stop when it wishes to? If there is, somebody put it there, and it was not the peasant. It was put there because a party with standing and means wanted it and was in a position to make the alternative expensive — and it survived, or did not, depending on how many parties with standing would lose something concrete if it were breached later.

That last clause is the whole test, and this empire supplies an almost laboratory-clean pair of cases to run it on. Two written protections, both real, both issued by the throne, a century apart. One lasted five hundred years and was extended by the dynasty that inherited it. The other lasted thirty-two years and was destroyed by a single memorial. The difference is not in their wording, and not in the sincerity of the men who granted them.

Two lists

In the spring of 1397 the metropolitan examination produced its result and every one of the fifty-one or fifty-two successful candidates was a southerner.

Northern candidates protested. They accused the chief examiner, Liu Sanwu, of favouring men from his own region and of taking bribes. The Hongwu emperor — no friend of the southern literati and thoroughly disposed to believe the charge — appointed a panel of a dozen officials to review every paper.

The review reported that there had been no cheating. The southern candidates had simply written better essays.

The emperor punished the examiners anyway, and issued a second list, of sixty-one northerners drawn from the men who had failed. Two lists were published for one examination — the Southern List and the Northern List — and thereafter the papers of metropolitan candidates were classified by geographical origin and quotas were set.

Follow what happened to that arrangement over the next five centuries. The Ming institutionalised it into a tripartite regional division of the *jinshi* quota. The Qing inherited it and made it finer: in 1712 the Kangxi emperor redistributed the quotas province by province, and provincial-level examinations came to carry quotas allocated not merely by province but in some cases by prefecture, with specific allowances written in for candidates from remote and backward districts. It was still running when the examinations were abolished in 1905.

Now audit it against the test. Why could no emperor simply drop it?

Because after 1397 it was not a favour to anyone. It was a countable annual entitlement belonging to every province in the north and west of the empire — to their candidates, to the gentry families who had bought decades of tuition on the strength of it, and to the officials from those provinces already in post who owed their own seats to it. An emperor who abolished the quota would not face one aggrieved examiner. He would face, in the same season, every literate family in eight provinces, and a large bloc of serving officials whose sons were relying on it.

That is a liberty in the only sense that has ever mattered: not a moral claim, but a distributed interest large enough to make breach more expensive than compliance.

And notice three things about how it came into being, because they are the pattern. It originated in a factional fight — northerners against southerners — within the hierarchy. The faction that won was *wrong on the merits*; the review found the southerners had genuinely done better, and the quota was granted anyway. And the beneficiary was not a

person but a category: nothing in the arrangement belonged to any individual candidate, and everything belonged to the region he came from.

The same instrument, cut the other way

The Qing added a second quota of the same kind and it has already appeared in this study in a different aspect: the reservation of appointments by ethnicity, the paired Manchu and Han presidencies at the boards, the fixed communal shares of senior office.

It is normally read as an instrument of Manchu domination, and it was. It was also the mechanism by which the Han share of high office stopped being contingent on the conquerors' goodwill and became a rule with a number attached — and therefore a thing a large and articulate class could be aggrieved about in unison if it were touched.

Both quotas work the same way. Both were produced by conflict between blocs inside the hierarchy. Both distribute an entitlement to categories rather than to persons. Both are enforceable because the aggrieved party is pre-assembled.

What could not be done at all

Against that, the foreclosures, which were early, explicit and aimed at exactly the capacities a claimant class needs.

The stone tablet promulgated to every prefecture, department and county in 1652 and cut into the schools where licentiates studied removed three things from the largest literate class in the empire: it forbade them to submit writings on any matter of public benefit or harm, on pain of losing their degree and being punished for so much as one word of proposal; it forbade them to swear leagues or form associations; and it forbade them to print what they wrote.

Petition, assembly, publication. Named, in stone, in the building where the class was formed, in the ninth year of the dynasty's rule in China.

Any account of Qing liberty has to begin there, and it has to notice the timing. The prohibition arrived *before* the licentiate class had accumulated any residue of its own. The late Ming had produced something close to a literati political movement — the Restoration Society, the academy networks, the collective memorials — and the Qing closed that arena at the outset, so that whatever bargains such a class might have struck

over the following two centuries were never struck at all. **You cannot find the residue of a negotiation that was prevented from happening.**

What could be done

The picture is not uniformly dark, and the protections that did exist are worth naming precisely because their source is so revealing.

An ordinary subject could sue, and did, in volume the archives record. Land, debt, inheritance, marriage and tenancy disputes came before the magistrate constantly, and commoners used the courts as an instrument rather than merely suffering them. In parts of the south a tenant could hold a permanent and saleable right to the surface of a field whose subsoil belonged to somebody else, and the courts enforced the division.

And tenants had protections against landlords that came from the throne. The Yongzheng emperor ruled that where no written contract of servitude existed, a landlord had no right to a tenant's labour service and no corresponding obligation to maintain him; tens of thousands of tenant-serfs in southern Anhui were formally liberated in 1809, and again in 1825.

Note where those came from. Not from a bargain struck by tenants, who had no standing to strike one. They came from a throne whose interest happened to run parallel to the tenant's and against the gentry's — because a gentleman who controls bonded labour and untaxed land is a gentleman with resources the state cannot see.

The one time somebody below was let in

Which brings the module to the clearest instance in Qing history of a group beneath the settlement being admitted, and to the factional fight underneath it.

The empire contained hereditary debased categories — *jianmin* — legally barred from the examinations and from most occupations, and marked out by ancestry. They were not one people but a scatter of local populations, each with its own local history: the music households of Shanxi and Shaanxi, forced into entertainment and prostitution; the fallen people and beggar households of Shaoxing and Ningbo in Zhejiang, working as undertakers, matchmakers and ritual specialists; the Nine Surnames boat people of the delta; the boat people of Guangdong and Fujian, barred from living

ashore; and the hereditary servants and bondsmen attached to particular gentry households in Anhui and Jiangxi.

Between 1723 and 1729 the Yongzheng emperor abolished the category, group by group, in a sequence of edicts. In the third month of 1723 the music households of Shanxi and Shaanxi were made commoners — on the initiative, the sources indicate, of a provincial censor named Nian Xi who had memorialised for it. In the ninth month the fallen people and beggar households of Shaoxing followed. In 1727 came the decree on the bondsmen and hereditary servants: where the deeds no longer existed and the master's house did not maintain them, nobody was to call them servants. In 1729 the boat people of Guangdong were permitted to come ashore, settle in villages near the water, and be entered on the registers as ordinary people.

Now look at what else that emperor was doing in exactly those years. He was merging the poll tax into the land tax over the resistance of landowners, shifting the burden onto acres. He was bringing the melting-fee surcharge into the public accounts and paying officials an allowance to stop them stealing. And he was pressing the policy summarised in the phrase *officials and gentry alike to perform labour service and pay the grain tax* — the removal of the exemptions that had made a degree worth having.

The 1727 decree on hereditary servants strikes at gentry households in Huizhou and Jiangxi specifically. It is not an isolated humanitarian gesture. It is one clause in a sustained campaign by a throne at war with the entrenched Chinese gentry over money, privilege and the invisibility of their resources.

The mean people were let in as a by-product of a fight one level above them. That is exactly the mechanism the framework predicts and it is here in dated edicts.

But now run the durability test, and the result is sobering. The legal category was abolished. The social practice persisted for generations — in some places into the twentieth century — because the emancipation had produced no defending constituency. If a village in Shaoxing went on treating a *duomin* family as a *duomin* family, who with standing lost anything? Nobody. The magistrate did not lose. The lineage did not lose. The gentry gained. The former *duomin* had no organisation, no degree, no property, no bloc and no vote, and therefore nobody to be aggrieved in unison with.

A right that costs nobody with standing anything when it is ignored will be ignored.

The control case

The cleanest demonstration of that principle in the whole of Qing history concerns a different group entirely.

On 22 March 1692 the Kangxi emperor issued what has come to be called the Edict of Toleration. Catholic churches in China were to be protected, and any subject of the empire was free to worship in them. The emperor's stated reasoning, as it comes down, was pragmatic to the point of bluntness: the Europeans were quiet, and nobody should trouble them. He was not interested in their religion. He valued their astronomy, their mathematics, their cannon-founding and their cartography, and the Jesuits ran his astronomical bureau.

It was, on its face, a broader grant of religious liberty than most European states offered in 1692.

Then Rome intervened. The Jesuits had permitted Chinese converts to continue ancestral rites and the honours paid to Confucius, on the argument that these were civil and filial rather than idolatrous; the Franciscans and Dominicans said otherwise; and successive papal decrees in 1704, 1707 and 1715 ruled against the Jesuits and forbade Chinese Catholics to take part. A papal legate arrived to enforce it. In 1721 Kangxi, having read the decree, wrote a short and contemptuous response — he had never seen a document containing so much nonsense, and westerners should no longer be permitted to preach in China — and the toleration was effectively over.

The formal proscription came in 1724, and the memorial that produced it is the most useful document in this module. Manchu officials advised the new emperor in 1723 that the Europeans at court were useful for the calendar and other services, but those in the provinces were of no use whatever; that they gathered men and women together indifferently on the pretext of prayer; that the churches should be converted into buildings of public use; and — the phrase that states the test in the negative — that *the empire receives no advantage at all*. Yongzheng proscribed Christianity as a heterodox teaching, and named it in the Amplified Instructions on the Sacred Edict that were read aloud in every village in the empire twice a month.

Set the two side by side.

The examination quota was demanded by a bloc with standing, granted against the merits, distributed to categories that continued to exist, and defended thereafter by everyone who held a share. It survived five centuries, a dynastic conquest, and every emperor who might have found it inconvenient.

The Edict of Toleration was granted by one man's favour, rested on the personal usefulness of a few dozen foreigners to one bureau, and had no Chinese constituency of standing whatsoever. When it was breached, the men who argued for the breach *gained*, the men who might have defended it were foreigners with no place in the hierarchy, and the Chinese converts had no more standing than the boat people of Guangdong. It lasted thirty-two years and died to a memorial.

Neither outcome had anything to do with how the grant was worded, or with whether the granting emperor meant it. Both emperors meant it.

Running the test backwards

The same instrument works in reverse, and the Qing supply that case too.

The gentry's exemptions — from labour service, from corporal punishment, from the effective share of the grain tax — were a genuine liberty by this module's definition: an entitlement held by a very large category of people with standing. Yongzheng attacked them directly, and did so with the full apparatus of an autocrat at the height of his powers.

He did not succeed. Much of the equalisation policy was relaxed or abandoned after his death in 1735, and the gentry's privileges substantially survived him.

That is the test running the other way and confirming itself. When the throne breached an entitlement held by hundreds of thousands of men who could all be aggrieved at once, who staffed the bureaucracy that had to implement the breach, and whose cooperation the state could not do without, the breach did not hold. When the same throne, a decade earlier, extended an entitlement to people who could not be aggrieved in unison, the extension did not hold either.

The wall a liberty rests on is the number of people with standing who lose something countable when it is touched. It has no other foundation, and the direction of the change is irrelevant.

The institution that was bought rather than banned

One further mechanism deserves naming because it shows a subtler way of preventing residue from forming.

The private academy had been, in the late Ming, the nearest thing China had to an autonomous corporate body with its own resources, its own membership and its own opinions — which is precisely why the Ming state had repeatedly attacked them and why the Donglin movement had grown out of one. The Qing did not, in the end, suppress them. In 1733 the Yongzheng emperor ordered the establishment of academies in the provincial capitals, funded from the treasury.

An institution that receives its endowment from the state does not need to be watched. It has been converted from a body that might have acquired standing of its own into one more place where the state's money buys the state's outcome. **Where an order finds a corporate body that could become an independent claimant, funding it is cheaper than banning it and leaves no grievance behind.**

Reading liberty against the framework

A liberty is a distribution of expected loss, and its durability can be predicted at the moment of grant by counting the beneficiaries who have standing. This case supplies a matched pair from the same state within a single century — the examination quota and the Edict of Toleration — identical in form, both written, both meant, and differing by a factor of fifteen in how long they lasted. The variable is not sincerity, wording, or the power of the granting emperor. It is whether the grant created a bloc that would suffer countable, simultaneous loss if it were withdrawn. **The instruction is to stop asking whether a liberty was genuine and start counting: how many parties with standing, how concentrated, how easily aggrieved together, and how immediately do they notice a breach.**

A liberty granted downward as a by-product of a fight higher up will not acquire defenders and decays into a dead letter. The emancipations of 1723 to 1729 were real edicts, imperially meant, and their beneficiaries genuinely gained a legal status they had not had. They were also, in their timing and their targets, one front in a throne's campaign against gentry privilege — and the people freed had no standing, no

property, no organisation and no bloc. The category disappeared from the code and survived in the villages for generations. **So when a study finds the settlement widening, the question is not whether the grantor was sincere but who among those with standing would lose if the grant were ignored; where the answer is nobody, expect a paper right, and expect the practice to outlive the law.**

Where an order forecloses the capacities required to bargain before a claimant class has bargained, the residue that class would have produced never exists at all. The Qing removed petition, association and publication from the licentiate class in 1652 — nine years into their rule in China, before the class had struck a single bargain with them, and by naming a category of person rather than a category of speech. The consequence is not that Qing liberties were weak; it is that a whole family of liberties has no history here to examine, because the negotiations that would have generated them were prevented at the outset. **A study that finds an unusually thin residue should check the foreclosure dates before concluding that the claimant class was weak or content.**

And where an order has no institution capable of holding an individual right, the residue takes the form of group shares. Everything that functioned as liberty in this empire was a quota: by region, by province, by prefecture, by ethnicity. Not one item of it belonged to a person; every item belonged to a category, and its enforceability came precisely from the fact that a category has many members who can be injured in the same instant. Group shares are durable, self-policing and cheap to defend. They are also completely useless to anyone the categories do not cover — the boat people, the debased households, the converts, the shed people in the hills — and they generate no principle that could be extended to those people, because a share is not an argument.

This is, in the end, the answer to the question this study carried in about whether an earnable boundary produces different residue from an unearnable one. It does, and not in the direction expected. The examination ladder was genuinely open, and what it generated over five centuries was not a single individual right of any kind. It generated **shares in the ladder** — and the men who held them defended the ladder ferociously, which is exactly what made the arrangement so hard to change and so difficult, in the nineteenth century, to reform.

A note on sources. This module quotes three short passages in English translation from primary documents, each taken from secondary literature rather than from an edition, and each is flagged. The Kangxi emperor's 1692 formulation that the Europeans

were quiet and should not be opposed, and his 1721 dismissal of the papal decree as a document containing much nonsense, are widely reproduced in the literature on the Rites Controversy; the renderings differ between accounts and neither is quoted here at length. The 1723 memorial by Manchu officials advising the proscription — that the Europeans at court were useful for the calendar while those in the provinces were of no use, that they gathered men and women indifferently, and that the empire received no advantage — is quoted in a translation by Jocelyn Marinescu as reproduced in a secondary account, and only the briefest phrases are used; anyone relying on its wording should go to Marinescu's study of the Jesuit response to the 1724 edict. Everything else here is paraphrase. On the 1397 case: the fifty-one or fifty-two southern graduates, the northern candidates' accusations against Liu Sanwu, the emperor's review panel, the finding of no cheating, the punishment of the examiners and the supplementary list of sixty-one northerners are consistent across the accounts, though sources differ on the number of southern graduates and on the examiners' fates; Kangxi's redistribution of the metropolitan quota by province in 1712 and the Qing use of prefecture-level allocations in the provincial examinations are from the quantitative literature on the examination quota system. On the emancipations, the sequence of edicts — the music households of Shanxi and Shaanxi in the third month of Yongzheng 1, the fallen people and beggar households of Shaoxing in the ninth month, the bondsmen and hereditary servants in Yongzheng 5, and the Guangdong boat people in Yongzheng 7 — follows a standard modern narrative history of the dynasty, and the attribution of the first to a memorial by the provincial censor Nian Xi comes from a specialist article on the *yuehu*; the internal politics of these edicts deserve much closer work than this module has given them, and there is a scholarly literature on their origins that I have not read. Note also that at least one recent study raises the question of whether the reform was aimed at emancipation or at bringing these populations under tighter moral regulation, and that alternative reading is not refuted by anything above. On tenancy: Yongzheng's ruling on the absence of servitude contracts and the liberations of 1809 and 1825 in southern Anhui are from standard reference accounts; the permanent-tenancy and divided-ownership arrangements of the south have a substantial literature this module summarises in a sentence. The 1733 order establishing state-funded provincial academies is standard, and the interpretation placed on it here is mine. The *woben* tablet of 1652 is quoted at length in the preceding module on suppression and carries the same warning: the Chinese text used there comes from an 1881 provincial recutting rather than from the promulgated original.

MODULE 10

FOURTEEN PROVINCES

Module 10 · Change and collapse — the largest rising in human history and why it failed, the army raised to defeat it and the man who stood it down, and the six years in which a dynasty dismantled the arrangement that had made its own elite defend it

The case that has to be met head-on

If a popular rising has ever made structural change anywhere, the Taiping is the candidate. It ran from 1850 to 1864. It held a capital for eleven years. It fielded armies in the hundreds of thousands, controlled the richest provinces in the empire, and killed on a scale usually given as twenty to thirty million and sometimes higher. It is by most reckonings the deadliest civil war in recorded history.

The proposition this study carries — that structural change never comes from the rising of the ruled, because a durable order is an armed settlement and only those who command organised force can alter it — has to survive that, or be corrected by it. So the module goes at it directly rather than around it, and takes the answer the evidence gives rather than the one the thesis would prefer.

Who led it

Hong Xiuquan was born into a literate Hakka farming family near Guangzhou. He sat the licentiate examination — the entry rung, the lowest gate in the whole apparatus — and failed it. He sat it again in 1836 and failed. He sat it a third time in 1837, failed, went home, fell seriously ill and had the visions. He sat it a fourth time in 1843 and failed again. He then worked as a village schoolteacher for five or six years, and lost that post in 1844 for destroying the Confucius tablets at the school where he taught.

Feng Yunshan, his cousin, was also a village teacher, also educated, and also unable to pass the examinations. It was Feng who went into Guangxi and built the God-Worshipping Society into an organisation of thousands, and Feng who supplied the administrative talent at the founding.

Two men formed by the examination curriculum and rejected by it, who then built a counter-doctrine out of the fragments of a foreign religion, an organisation out of a marginal minority in a frontier province, and a programme out of the inversion of everything the curriculum had taught them. As an instance of the frustrated aspirant leading the crowd, it could hardly be cleaner.

And then a complication arrives which looks like a counter-example and is in fact a finding about something else.

When Hong and Feng were absent from Guangxi in 1848, two new leaders emerged from the Society itself and established their authority by claiming to speak with the voices of God the Father and of Christ. One of them was Xiao Chaogui, of humble origins. The other was Yang Xiuqing — a Hakka charcoal burner from Guangxi, a man with no education, no degree, no examination history and no elite formation of any kind.

Feng Yunshan died of wounds in June 1852 and Xiao Chaogui was killed at Changsha that September. From that point until his murder in 1856, Yang Xiuqing was the effective commander and administrator of the Taiping state: he directed the campaigns, ran the bureaucracy, imposed the communal property system, and accumulated enough power that Hong had him and his household killed to be rid of him.

At the height of the largest rebellion in human history, the man actually running it had been burning charcoal in the hills of Guangxi a decade earlier.

It is tempting to read that as a refutation, and it is not one, because it answers a question nobody asked. The claim under test concerns the *authorship of structural change* — who moves an armed settlement — and this movement moved nothing: it failed, changed no structure, and left no successor order to attribute to anybody. There is no authorship here to assign.

What Yang Xiuqing is evidence about is something else, and something the framework should take on board. **A functioning hierarchy screens for formation; a collapsed one screens for what works this week.** Under an intact order the ablest charcoal burner in Guangxi burns charcoal, and does so not because ability is scarce among the poor but because the filter that allocates command is an examination he is not permitted to sit. Break the order and the filter breaks with it, and ability starts being selected on results, in the field, immediately. Yang did not open that gap; two

examination-formed men opened it, with a doctrine, an organisation and a programme none of which he could have supplied. He walked into it and turned out to be very good.

The rest of his story completes the point. In September 1856 Hong Xiuquan had him and his household killed. The man the breakdown had raised was disposed of by the men who had caused the breakdown, and the movement never recovered. Talent surfacing in the gap is a real phenomenon, and it is not the same thing as talent making the gap — and it is the reason the morning after every such episode discloses either a new elite in the old seats or the corpse of whoever rose fastest.

And it lost

Fourteen years, a capital, provinces, tens of millions dead — and the dynasty survived it by half a century.

That is the load-bearing half of the argument and it should not be lost in the qualification above. The Taiping did not change the structure of Chinese society, did not widen the settlement, did not survive, and did not extract a single lasting concession. Everything it built was destroyed. The men who beat it went on to hold the highest offices in the empire it had failed to overthrow.

A rising against a floor that can still be reconstituted loses. The Taiping is not a counter-example to that. It is the largest confirmation of it available.

But the floor that beat it was not the floor it had faced

The interesting question is not why the Taiping lost but *what beat it*, and the answer changed the empire permanently.

The banner garrisons were useless. The Green Standard was worse. What the court did instead, from 1853, was authorise scholar-officials to go home and raise troops.

Zeng Guofan was a *jinshi*, a senior metropolitan official and a serious Confucian scholar with no military experience whatever. Sent home to Hunan on mourning leave, he took the village militia tradition — the *tuanlian* — and built something the empire had never permitted: a standing regional army, recruited locally through the gentry networks of his own province, officered by men he chose personally, disciplined on his own principles, paid out of local funds and out of the transit levy introduced in 1853 to

finance exactly this, and loyal to him rather than to Beijing. By 1860 the Xiang Army numbered something like three hundred and sixty thousand men. Zuo Zongtang and Li Hongzhang, both of whom served under him, raised their own on the same model. From 1860 the court began appointing these men governors-general and governors of the provinces their troops occupied.

Set that beside what the previous century and a half of this dynasty had been built to prevent. After 1681 the Qing had made certain that no provincial official ever held an army and a revenue together, because that combination had produced the Three Feudatories and eight years of civil war. In 1853 the court handed both back, to Chinese officials, in their home provinces, because it had no alternative.

The man who stood it down

Here the story does what the thesis this study carried in did not expect, and the divergence is the most important thing in the module.

Zeng Guofan's army took Nanjing in July 1864. He had three hundred thousand men under arms, the prestige of having saved the dynasty, a province that was effectively his, and a court in Beijing with nothing left to stop him.

He disbanded most of the army.

He then spent his remaining years on reconstruction, sponsored one of China's first modern arsenals, mentored the next generation of officials, and died in 1872 honoured as the man who had preserved the empire.

Why he did not move is a genuinely open question and the honest answer is that his interior is not recoverable. But the structural position can be described, and it is more informative than any speculation about his conscience.

Zeng was a *jinshi* from an examination family. Everything he was worth — his rank, his moral authority, his reputation, his family's standing, the very categories in which he and everyone around him understood what he had just done — was denominated in a currency only the existing arrangement could mint. He had saved the dynasty; that was the whole of his stature, and it was payable only in that dynasty's coin. The moment he marched on Beijing he would have converted himself from the empire's greatest servant into a warlord, and his officers — Hunan gentry who had raised those troops on his name and who wanted their own sons to sit examinations — would each have had to

decide privately whether to follow one. **An army can win a battle. It cannot mint a mandate.** Zeng had three hundred thousand men and no way to make them into a legitimacy, and he had spent his entire life inside the only institution that manufactured the thing he would have needed.

The pattern is not peculiar to China. Sulla marched twice, took Rome, and then resigned the dictatorship and handed the arrangement back with its aristocratic constitution reinforced. Washington held an army whose officers pressed him toward a crown, declined, and gave up the command. In each case a man with the force to seize declined to, and in each case his standing was denominated in the currency of the order he would have had to destroy in order to rule it. **The default held at the exact moment it could most easily have failed, and it held in the man best placed to break it.**

So the notion that the floor simply changed hands in the 1860s and never came back needs correcting. It did not change hands in 1864. What survived was not Zeng's army but the *model*: the brave-battalion system as a permanent alternative to the banners, the transit levy as a permanent provincial revenue, the practice of appointing regional commanders to govern the provinces they held — and, crucially, Li Hongzhang's Huai Army, which was not disbanded, which absorbed western arms and drill, and from which the Beiyang Army descended.

A floor transferred in a crisis stays transferred only where the transferee's own position has stopped depending on the old arrangement. Zeng's depended on it entirely. His successors' depended on an army.

The six years

Between 1864 and 1911 the arrangement survived a further war with France, a catastrophic defeat by Japan, the Boxer disaster and an allied occupation of Beijing, and indemnities that on one reckoning came to seven hundred and thirteen million taels by 1900 — something like seventeen years of the empire's entire direct tax revenue. It survived all of it.

What it did not survive was its own reform programme.

After the Boxer catastrophe the court launched the New Policies. Modern schools were founded. Students were sent abroad, chiefly to Japan, in unprecedented numbers. Provincial assemblies were created. The army was reorganised on western lines.

And on 2 September 1905 the civil examinations were abolished, at every level, at a stroke.

Consider what that instrument did to the chain this study audited in an earlier module. The local gentleman's standing — his exemptions, his access to the magistrate, his mediating monopoly, his family's decades of investment in tuition — had rested on a register the state maintained. The state stopped maintaining it. A degree still held conferred prestige but led nowhere; a degree not yet obtained could never be obtained; and the sons of every examination family in China woke up to find the ladder their grandfathers had climbed simply gone.

Every other reform pointed the same way. The provincial assemblies of 1909 gave the gentry a platform whose authority came from election rather than from imperial certification — a standing that did not depend on the throne. The new schools and the students in Tokyo produced a large cohort of formed, ambitious young men with no imperial career available and easy access to the revolutionary societies. The New Army was full of literate men who a decade earlier would have been examination candidates.

Then, in 1911, the court nationalised the provincial railway companies to raise money, which took cash out of the pockets of the gentry and merchants who had invested in them. The Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan turned an economic grievance into a political one, and troops had to be sent from Hubei to suppress it.

In six years, in the name of saving itself, the dynasty dismantled the mechanism by which its own elite had acquired a stake in it.

October

On 10 October 1911 a bomb went off accidentally in a revolutionary safe house, exposing a plot, and New Army units in Wuchang mutinied ahead of schedule and took the city.

Within two months, fourteen provinces had declared independence.

The finding that matters is Xiaowei Zheng's, and it is stated in her study of the revolution with a precision this module cannot improve on: in every one of those fourteen provinces the gentry and the officials — the key constituents of the infrastructure of imperial rule — turned their backs on the monarchy, and with their defection the fall of the dynasty became inevitable.

Not a peasant rising. Not a foreign conquest. Not a fracture in which one court faction armed the people against another. The men who had held China for the Qing for two hundred and sixty-eight years, county by county, simply stopped.

The court recalled Yuan Shikai, commander of the Beiyang Army — which had grown out of Li Hongzhang's Huai Army, which had been raised on Zeng Guofan's model in the 1860s to save the dynasty from the Taiping. Yuan negotiated with the court and with the revolutionaries simultaneously, extracted the abdication on 12 February 1912, and took the republic for himself.

The men who ended the dynasty were the institutional descendants of the men who had saved it. The seed for this study asked whether that was so, and the answer is yes, though not by the route expected: not because the provincial armies rebelled, but because the arrangement had stopped paying the class those armies' founders had come from, and one of their heirs was standing there with the only army that mattered when it stopped.

Which crack was it?

Run the four modes and the answer is instructive because none of them quite fits.

Conquest — no. The foreign wars were humiliating, financially crushing and strategically decisive in shaping what the court attempted, but no outside power imposed a new order in 1911. The Japanese, the British and the Russians all had armies that could have; none of them was the agent.

Exhaustion — partly. The indemnities were ruinous and the fiscal architecture described earlier in this study had no reserve whatever to meet them. But the state still had armies in 1911. It was not militarily prostrate. It was politically abandoned.

Overproduction — chronically, and worsened by the state's own hand. The examination system had always formed more men than it seated; the sale of degrees widened the pool enormously; and by 1905 the outlets that had absorbed the surplus for two centuries were closing at both ends. Hong Xiuquan in 1843 and the Tokyo student of 1905 are the same structural person.

Fracture — yes, and this is the decisive one, but of a kind the framework does not quite name. In 1911 no faction of the elite armed the people against another faction. There was no court civil war. The gentry and officials of fourteen provinces did not *fight*

the dynasty; they declined to go on holding it up, more or less simultaneously, and then negotiated terms.

So this case argues for a fifth entry, or a variant of the first: the default lapsing. Not a split, not exhaustion, not conquest — the quiet, distributed, uncoordinated withdrawal of a class that had defended the arrangement because defending itself meant defending the arrangement, and that discovered it no longer did. It has no battle to date and no manifesto. Its diagnostic is a policy that removed the class's stake, an interval, and then a defection counted not in casualties but in provinces.

And the weight below

The honest objection has to be granted in full, because it applies here more forcefully than in most cases.

The Taiping did not break the floor and could not have. But it did something the framework's own account allows for and this case demonstrates unusually clearly: it changed the price. The transit levy exists because of the Taiping. The provincial armies exist because of the Taiping. The permanent shift in the balance between Beijing and the provincial capitals dates from the Taiping. The court did not concede those things out of conviction; it conceded them because the alternative was to be destroyed by a movement of Hakka charcoal burners and failed licentiates, and the concessions turned out to be irreversible.

The pressure from below did not make the structural change. It made the structural change *necessary to survive*, and the elite that repriced the arrangement in response repriced it in a way that eventually cost them everything. That is the lever worked from above and the weight applied from below, and neither half of the sentence can be dropped.

Reading collapse against the framework

Breakdown does not change who authors structural change; it changes the filter that allocates command, and the two should not be confused. The largest rising in human history was founded, doctrinally armed and organisationally built by two men the examination system had formed and rejected, and it altered no structure whatever — so there is no authorship in it to assign to anyone. What it does show is that an intact

hierarchy allocates command by formation, and a broken one allocates it by results: Yang Xiuqing, who under a functioning order would have gone on burning charcoal in Guangxi however able he was, commanded a state within four years of the filter breaking. **So when a study finds a man of no formation exercising real command, it has located a broken filter rather than a new author** — and it should look for who broke it, which will be someone the old filter formed and rejected. The corollary is on the record here too: in September 1856 the men who had opened the gap murdered the man who had risen through it, and the movement never recovered. Ability surfacing in a breakdown is real and is almost never what survives the breakdown.

A commander with the force to seize will decline to when his own standing is denominated in a currency only the existing arrangement can mint — and the question to ask is never his conscience but his coin. Zeng Guofan held three hundred thousand men and the empire's gratitude in 1864 and stood the army down; Sulla took Rome twice and handed it back; Washington's officers pressed a crown on him and he gave up the command. Nothing links those three except the structural fact that each man's entire worth was payable in the coin of the order he would have had to destroy in order to rule it. An army can win a battle and cannot mint a mandate. **This case supplies both controls.** Wu Sangui in 1673 held a province, an army and a revenue and moved — and he had no such currency to lose, being a defector twice over whose standing had never been anything but military, and he was destroyed. Yuan Shikai in 1912 took the republic, and in 1915 tried to convert it into a throne, and the attempt collapsed inside months — because by then the mint had been closed, in 1905, by the dynasty he had helped to end. **So when a study finds an order surviving by arming men outside its settlement, do not date the abdication to the arming. Date it to the moment those men acquire a source of standing the order does not issue — and expect the interval to be a generation or more, because it takes that long for the currency to change.**

An order that reforms by abolishing its own recruitment ladder destroys its default faster than any rebellion can. The comparison is exact and it is the most useful thing this module produces. The Taiping spent fourteen years and twenty million lives attacking the arrangement from outside and failed completely. The abolition of the examinations on 2 September 1905 attacked it from inside, cost nothing, was intended to strengthen the state, and the dynasty was gone in six years and four months. **The single most dangerous act available to any durable order is the removal of the mechanism by which its own elite acquires a stake — and the commonest occasion**

for that act is reform, undertaken in good faith, by a frightened apex trying to save itself.

And the default can lapse rather than fracture, which is a distinct mode of collapse and leaves a different evidentiary signature. Fracture produces a civil war, exhaustion produces a lost war, conquest produces an occupying army; all three leave dates, battles and documents. A lapsed default leaves almost nothing — no rising against the order, no faction arming the people, no manifesto — just a class that stops turning up, in many places at once, for the same reason. **The way to find it is to audit the chain forward: identify the class that holds the order together, find the date its stake was removed, and then look one to ten years later for a defection counted in jurisdictions rather than in casualties.** In this case the class was the degree-holding gentry, the date was 2 September 1905, and the count was fourteen.

A note on sources. This module quotes no primary text. Everything is paraphrase from modern scholarship and the load-bearing items are credited here. On the Taiping leadership: Hong Xiuquan's four failed attempts at the licentiate examination, his family's status as literate Hakka farmers, the visions following his third failure in 1837, his years as a village teacher and his dismissal in 1844 are consistent across the standard accounts, including Jonathan Spence's; sources differ on whether he failed three or four times before the visions and on the exact dates, and the module gives the commonest version. Feng Yunshan's status as an educated village teacher who could not pass the examinations follows Spence. The account of Yang Xiuqing as a Hakka charcoal burner of humble origins who became the effective commander and administrator after the deaths of Feng and Xiao Chaogui in mid-1852, and was murdered with his household in September 1856, is standard; his birth year is variously given as about 1820 or 1823. The social origins of Wei Changhui and Shi Dakai — landed and comparatively wealthy families — are noted from the reference literature and have not been independently checked, and nothing above rests on them. The death toll is given as twenty to thirty million because that is the conventional range; it is not securely established and the demography of the mid-nineteenth-century catastrophe is the business of the following module, where it will be handled with the ranges it requires. On the Xiang Army: its origin in the *tuanlian* militia from 1852–53, its funding from local contributions and from the transit levy introduced in 1853, its recruitment through Zeng's Hunan gentry networks, its personal loyalty to its commanders, its strength of about 360,000 by 1860, the capture of Nanjing in 1864 and Zeng's subsequent disbandment of most of it are from the standard accounts including Britannica's and the reference literature on the

brave-battalion system; the figure of 360,000 is a peak and should be treated as approximate. Li Hongzhang's Huai Army of 1862 and its descent to the Beiyang Army are standard, and the claim that the court began appointing regional commanders as governors-general from 1860 is likewise. On the end: the abolition of the examinations on 2 September 1905, the provincial assemblies of 1909, the railway nationalisation and the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement of 1911, the accidental explosion that forced the Wuchang plotters to act, the mutiny of 10 October, the fourteen provinces declaring independence within two months, Yuan Shikai's recall and double game, and Puyi's abdication on 12 February 1912 are all uncontested chronology. The decisive interpretive claim — that in all fourteen provinces the gentry and officials turned their backs on the monarchy, and that their defection made the fall inevitable — is Xiaowei Zheng's, in *The Politics of Rights and the 1911 Revolution in China*, and is paraphrased from the introduction to that book; the argument in this module leans on it heavily and a reader who doubts the conclusion should go there first. The indemnity figure of about 713 million taels by 1900, and its equivalence to roughly seventeen years of direct tax revenue, is Kent Deng's. Yuan Shikai's attempt to make himself emperor in December 1915 and its abandonment in March 1916 are uncontested chronology. Two comparisons are used above as illustrations and were not researched for this study: Sulla's resignation of the dictatorship and Washington's refusal of his officers' urging are invoked for their structural shape only, and a reader who wants to press the parallel should go to the specialist literature on each, where the motives of both men are considerably disputed. Finally, two propositions in the closing section are this study's own and are offered for the next case to break: the reading of breakdown as a change in the filter that allocates command rather than in the authorship of change, and the proposed fifth mode of collapse — the lapsed default.

MODULE 11

THE RIVER WENT NORTH

Module 11 · The grim accounting — what the sword took at the founding and on the frontier, what the coordination built, and what came due on the day the coordination stopped

Two columns, and they do not net

This module keeps two accounts and refuses to reconcile them, because they cannot be reconciled and the attempt is always a smuggled verdict.

One is the account of the sword: the people killed to make the settlement and to hold its edges. The other is the account of the metabolism: the population that a century of peace and coordinated administration raised above what the bare land could carry, and the bill that came due when the coordination stopped. The second is larger than the first and is almost never attributed to the order that generated it, because when it falls due it arrives in the form of weather.

Both columns are real. The arithmetic is the reader's.

The sword: making the settlement

The founding cost is spread across thirty-nine years, from the pass in 1644 to the surrender of Taiwan in 1683, and it cannot be totalled.

Sichuan was depopulated in the wars of the 1640s to a degree that required the Qing to spend the next century paying people to move there. The Yangtze delta was made an example in 1645 — Yangzhou, where the death toll of more than eight hundred thousand given by the survivor Wang Xiuchu is rejected by modern scholarship as impossible for a city of that size, and where no reliable figure exists; Jiangyin, besieged for some eighty days over the queue order and destroyed; Jiading, put down more than once. The southwest was fought over until 1662 and the last Ming emperor executed at Kunming. And from 1661 the entire population of the coastal strip from Shandong to

Guangdong was moved thirty to fifty *li* inland, houses burned and boats broken, for twenty-two years, to starve out a maritime power the dynasty could not reach.

None of these has a number that will bear weight, and the honest statement is that the founding killed on a scale the sources cannot recover.

The sword: holding the edge

The frontier account is separable and this study has been thin on it, which is a fault, because it contains the largest single deliberate act of destruction in the dynasty's history and it happened not in the desperate founding but at the confident summit.

In 1755 the Qing conquered the Dzungar Khanate — the last great nomadic empire in Asia, a Tibetan Buddhist Oirat confederation on the Ili — with the assistance of the Dzungar leader Amursana, whom they then proposed to make khan of one of four successor tribes. Amursana wanted the whole and rebelled.

The Qianlong emperor's response was an order for the eradication of the Dzungar nation and name. His commanders were instructed to massacre and to show no mercy; rewards were offered for carrying it out; in the autumn of 1757 he was still criticising two of his generals for shrinking from wholesale slaughter despite continual prodding. The men of Barkol and Suzhou were to be killed and their wives and children divided among the soldiers.

The Qing scholar Wei Yuan, writing his own account of the war, gave the breakdown: something like forty to fifty per cent of Dzungar households destroyed by smallpox, twenty per cent fled to Russia or the Kazakhs, thirty per cent killed by the army — leaving, in his phrase, no yurts for several thousand *li* except those of the surrendered.

The estimates converge on a pre-conquest population of about six hundred thousand and a decline of seventy to eighty per cent. Peter Perdue, working from the Chinese sources, calculates four hundred and twenty to four hundred and eighty thousand deaths, emphasising that disease and induced starvation amplified the direct killing. Michael Clarke puts it at eighty per cent, four hundred and eighty to six hundred thousand, and calls it the complete destruction not only of the Dzungar state but of the Dzungars as a people.

Dzungaria was then repopulated with Han, Hui, Uyghur and Xibe settlers on state farms, alongside banner garrisons.

Hold two things together. The Qing empire's greatest achievement of territorial extent — the north-western third of the modern map of China, the reason Xinjiang is where it is — rests directly on this. And it was done in the middle of the High Qing, by the emperor who commissioned the *Siku Quanshu*, in the decades usually described as the summit of Chinese civilisation. It is not a symptom of decline or desperation. It is what a competent, confident, well-financed state did when a frontier problem would not otherwise stay solved.

The peace of the core was financed, in part, on the edge, and the two entries were never made on the same page.

What the coordination built

Now the second account, and it has to be laid out mechanically because the causation runs through several steps and the last one is usually mistaken for an act of God.

Between roughly 1700 and 1850 the population of China went from about a hundred and fifty million to something like four hundred and thirty million. It did not do this because the land got bigger. Arable land per head fell from about 7.87 *mu* in 1736 to about 2.78 *mu* by the end of the eighteenth century.

It did it because of coordination, and the components are identifiable.

Peace. From 1683 to 1796 there was no general war inside China proper. A population not being killed, displaced or conscripted grows.

New crops on ground that had not been farmable. Maize, sweet potato and peanut, arriving from the Americas, would grow on dry slopes and thin soils where rice would not, and the uplands of Hubei, Sichuan, Shaanxi and the southeast filled with people growing them.

Steered migration. The state paid settlers into depopulated Sichuan with land, oxen, seed and tax holidays; tolerated movement into Taiwan, the southwest and the hills; and thereby moved population toward the food rather than waiting for the food to reach the population.

A fiscal change that removed the penalty on existing. The poll tax was frozen in 1712 and folded into the land tax from the 1720s, so that a household with more members no longer owed more to the state for having them.

And a buffer. Ever-normal granaries in each of more than thirteen hundred county seats, selling in the spring when prices rose and restocking after harvest, with community and charitable granaries behind them, and grain moved between provinces to meet shortfall. National reserves ran between twenty-seven and forty-one million *shi* through the middle of the eighteenth century, and one reckoning puts the high-Qing granary total at around forty-eight million piculs.

Put those together and what you have is a population held at a level the bare land could not sustain on its own, by a set of arrangements that had to keep working. Every one of them was a promise. **The excess population was the note, and the coordination was the only thing servicing it.**

The note falls due

The sequence from 1850 is causally legible, step by step, and each step consumes a component of the buffer.

The reserve is spent on the wars. The Taiping, the Nian, and the Muslim revolts in the southwest and the northwest ran, overlapping, from 1850 into the 1870s. The Taiping cut the capital off from the land tax and salt revenue of thirteen provinces. On one calculation military expenditure came to nearly three-quarters of total government spending. And the granaries were consumed: national reserves fell from something like forty-eight million piculs in the high Qing to under twenty million by the 1850s.

The maintenance stops, and the river moves. On 19 June 1855 the levee at Tongwaxiang, near Kaifeng, gave way. The riverbed at that point stood thirty to forty feet above the surrounding plain, held there by centuries of dyke-raising against the silt. A breach three miles wide opened and the Yellow River went downhill onto the North China plain. More than two hundred thousand people died in the immediate floods and seven million lost their homes.

The Qing government, in the middle of the Taiping war, did not have the reserve to close the breach.

So the river did not go back. Over the following years it abandoned the course it had held south of the Shandong peninsula since 1194 — six hundred and sixty-one years — swung north, submerged the Grand Canal at Zhangqiu, and cut a new mouth into the Bohai Gulf, where it still is.

That is the metabolic mechanism made visible in a single object. A river had been held on an unnatural course by continuous human labour for six centuries. The labour stopped for a few seasons because the labourers' government was fighting for its life. The water went where water goes.

Then disease. The third plague pandemic began in Yunnan in 1855, in the middle of the Muslim revolt there, and killed something like two million people in China before it reached the wider world.

And then the drought arrives at an empty store. The rains failed across the Yellow River basin from 1876, and 1877 brought a near-total failure of precipitation — the most intense drought in north China in over three hundred years, across five provinces and an affected population of about a hundred and eight million. Harvests in parts of Shanxi came in at twenty per cent of normal.

Between nine and a half and thirteen million people died. Shanxi lost about five and a half million, Zhili two and a half, Henan one, Shandong half a million. Counting migration as well as death, the census registers show a fall of twenty-three million across the affected provinces — Shanxi down forty-eight per cent, Henan twenty-two, Shaanxi twenty-five.

And the reason it was that lethal is on the record. Shanxi's provincial revenue was around three million taels against expenditure of five, its treasury emptied by the contributions it had made to suppressing the mid-century rebellions. The granaries that would have met a drought of this kind in 1750 held less than half what they once had, and in the worst places nothing. Officials fell back on distributing cash rather than grain, into a market that had no grain to sell.

The drought did not cause the famine. The drought arrived after the buffer had been spent, and that is a different proposition. The same weather in the 1750s would have been a bad year.

What it came to

The whole is contested at the scale of tens of millions and must be given as a range with the reason attached.

China's population stood at something like four hundred and thirty million around 1850. Between then and about 1870 it fell — by more than fifty million on the

conservative reconstructions, by considerably more on others. The Taiping alone is conventionally given at twenty to thirty million dead, and some estimates run far higher. The Nian, the Panthay revolt in Yunnan and the Dungan revolt in the northwest each killed on a scale that in any other century would be the century's defining catastrophe; in Shaanxi the Muslim population is generally reckoned to have been reduced by well over ninety per cent through killing, flight and starvation. Then the flood of 1855, the plague from 1855, and the famine of 1876–79 on top.

The figures cannot be tightened, and it is worth saying why rather than pretending. The registers of the affected provinces were destroyed in the fighting. The pre-crisis figures were fiscal instruments rather than censuses. Migration and death are indistinguishable in a register that records only who is no longer there. And every party to the reckoning — the dynasty, the rebels, the missionaries who raised relief funds, and the revolutionaries who later used the numbers — had reasons to prefer a particular magnitude.

What can be said without a number is that within a single human lifetime, in the same country, the population rose by more than any population had ever risen and then fell by more than the entire population of most contemporary European states.

The other column, at full strength

None of the above is to be set against the following, and the following is not to be set against the above. Both are entries.

The Qing gave China the largest territorial extent in its history and very largely the borders it has now. They gave it a hundred and thirteen years without a general war on its soil, after a century of catastrophe. Under them the population roughly tripled, which is to say that a very large number of people who would not otherwise have been born, lived. They built and ran, for a century, the most extensive famine-relief system in the pre-modern world, and it worked: the granaries met the ordinary bad years, at scale, across an empire, for four generations. In the advanced regions living standards were arguably at European parity around 1800. They ran an administration foreign observers admired and copied. They abolished a hereditary debased status, took the head tax off the landless, and froze the land tax for a century. And an ordinary peasant in Hunan under Qianlong could reasonably expect to die of old age, which is not a thing his great-grandfather could have expected.

The century of peace is not a consolation offered against the twenty million dead. It is a separate entry, in the same ledger, of comparable magnitude, and the study's whole job is to put both on the page and keep them apart.

And the forgetting

One last item belongs here, because it is the mechanism by which such accounts get closed.

The mark imposed on every adult male head in 1645, over which Jiangyin held out for eighty days and cities were destroyed, was by 1850 what the population understood a Chinese man's head to look like — so completely that when the Taiping grew their hair out, ordinary people called them *long hairs* and *hair rebels*, and by 1917 a villager who had lost his queue was frightened.

The cost was paid in full by people whose great-grandchildren did not know a cost had been paid. That is not an accident of memory. It is how an armed settlement becomes furniture, and it is why the accounting has to be done deliberately and from outside, because nobody inside the arrangement has any reason to do it.

Reading the accounting against the framework

An order with intensive agriculture and a state-maintained buffer carries a population above the land's bare capacity, and that excess is a liability whose maturity date is the next coordination failure. The Qing supply the cleanest instance in the corpus because both halves are documented and dated. The buffer is itemisable — peace, new crops, steered migration, a fiscal system that stopped penalising births, and granaries holding on the order of forty-eight million piculs. Its exhaustion is itemisable — reserves under twenty million by the 1850s, provincial treasuries emptied into the campaigns, military spending at three-quarters of the budget. And the call is dated: a levee in 1855 and a drought in 1876. **The instruction is to calculate, in any such order, how much of the population is standing on coordination rather than on land, and to treat that figure as debt — because when the call comes it will be recorded as flood, plague and drought, and the causal chain running back to the political failure will not appear in the account.**

The hydraulic obligation is the most honest available measure of a state's real capacity, because it cannot be faked and it does not depend on the state's own records. A dyke is either maintained or it is not, and a river's behaviour is not a matter of interpretation. The Yellow River was held on a southern course by continuous labour from 1194 to 1855; the labour lapsed for a few seasons while the dynasty fought for survival, and the river relocated permanently, took the Grand Canal with it, and displaced seven million people. **Where a study needs a measurement of capacity that is not filtered through an order's own reporting, find the maintenance obligation that physics enforces and date the first failure.** It will generally precede the political collapse by decades and predict it.

The frontier account and the core account are the same account, and every order keeps them in separate books. The reign remembered for the Four Treasuries and the century of peace is the reign that destroyed seventy to eighty per cent of a people on the north-west frontier by explicit imperial order, and then settled the emptied land. The two facts are not in tension and were never experienced as being in tension, because the constituency that benefited from the first never had to read about the second. **So when a study finds an order at its confident height, it should look outward and downward for the entries that are not in the celebratory column — and expect them to be found at the frontier, in the reigns the order is proudest of, executed by its most competent administrations.**

And the columns do not net. The Mamluk study ended holding two irreconcilable things and declined to resolve them, and this one reaches the same place by a different road. A hundred and thirteen years of peace, a population tripled and the largest granary system in the pre-modern world stand in one column. Six hundred thousand Dzungars, an unrecoverable founding toll, twenty to thirty million dead in a single rebellion, a river moved, a coast cleared and thirteen million starved in three years stand in the other. There is no exchange rate. Anyone who produces one has stopped doing history and started delivering a verdict, and the discipline of this collection is to put both columns on the page, keep them apart, and let the reader do the arithmetic himself.

A note on sources. This module quotes no primary text directly; Wei Yuan's characterisation of Dzungaria after the campaign — no yurts for several thousand *li* except those of the surrendered — and his breakdown of Dzungar losses are paraphrased from secondary reproductions of his account and not from an edition, and his percentages are variously reported (smallpox at forty or fifty per cent of households in

different renderings). All figures in this module are contested and several are contested very widely; they are given as ranges and the ranges are the finding. On the Dzungars: the pre-conquest population of about 600,000, the decline of seventy to eighty per cent, Peter Perdue's calculation of 420,000–480,000 deaths in *China Marches West*, Michael Clarke's estimate of eighty per cent and his judgement that the campaign destroyed the Dzungars as a people, and Qianlong's documented orders and his rebuke of generals who shrank from slaughter are from the specialist literature; there is a live scholarly argument about whether Qing policy is best characterised as genocidal intent throughout or as hardening in response to Amursana's revolt and then relaxing, and Perdue takes a more qualified position than some of the sources that cite him. On the granaries: the national reserves of twenty-seven to forty-one million *shi* between 1736 and 1779 are from Will and Wong's *Nourish the People*; the figures of about forty-eight million piculs in the high Qing falling to under twenty million by the 1850s come from a secondary account of the 1876–79 famine and use a different unit and a different series, so the two should not be arithmetically combined — what they jointly support is the direction and rough magnitude of the collapse, not a precise ratio. On the 1855 flood: the breach at Tongwaxiang on 19 June, the riverbed standing thirty to forty feet above the plain, the breach of about three miles, the deaths of more than two hundred thousand and seven million made homeless, the submergence of the Grand Canal at Zhangqiu, and the river's abandonment of the course it had held since 1194 are from the standard accounts and from the reference literature on the river; the immediate death figure is an estimate and the process of avulsion took years rather than a single day. On the 1876–79 famine: the death range of 9.5 to 13 million, the affected population of about 108 million, the provincial breakdown, the census fall of 23 million including migration, the identification of the drought as the most intense in north China in over three hundred years and its association with the 1877–78 El Niño, and Shanxi's revenue shortfall are from Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley's work and the literature built on it. The population series — roughly 150 million around 1700, over 300 million by the late eighteenth century, about 430 million by 1850, falling by more than 50 million by 1870 — and the arable land per head figures of 7.87 *mu* in 1736 against 2.78 by the late eighteenth century are from the demographic literature and are among the most disputed numbers in Chinese history; the reasons for the dispute are set out in the text and should be taken seriously rather than treated as a formality. The Taiping toll of twenty to thirty million is conventional and both higher and lower figures are seriously argued. The claim about the Shaanxi Muslim population's reduction is widely repeated and I have not verified it

against a demographic study; it is stated here with a hedge and should be checked. The observation on living standards at European parity around 1800 is Kenneth Pomeranz's and is itself the subject of a large and unresolved debate.

MODULE 12

TWO DOORS

Module 12 · Convergence and divergence — where this conquest ran the same machinery as every other in the collection, where it ran something the collection has not seen, what it contributes, and the strongest case for the defence

The distinction the whole study turned on

An examination in Qing China admitted a Chinese man to office. It admitted him to the Grand Council, to a governorship, to a board presidency, to the highest civil positions in the largest empire on earth. It never admitted him to the banners.

Those are two doors, and almost everything peculiar about this order follows from its having run both at once, for two hundred and sixty-eight years, over the same population.

The collection has seen orders with one door of each kind. The Mamluk sultanate recruited its ruling caste by an unearnable criterion — foreign birth, purchase, importation — and *therefore* educated its subjects generously, endowed their schools and funded their scholars, because the schoolroom could not possibly be the door and so nothing was risked by opening it. The colonial orders in this collection ran the mirror image: a boundary the conquered could not cross and a formation deliberately withheld, because there the schoolroom pointed at a door the order had no intention of unlocking, and forming the majority would have meant admitting them.

The Qing ran both logics simultaneously and kept them from colliding by keeping the doors separate. Formation was not withheld — the examinations reopened in 1646 with the curriculum untouched, and the state funded provincial academies, promoted the classics, and canonised Chinese virtue. Office was not withheld — Han officials filled the bureaucracy and a Han grand secretary was among the most powerful men of the eighteenth century. What was withheld was membership of the caste, and the caste's monopoly was not on office. It was on the stipend, the walled quarter, the separate criminal liability, and the residual armed force behind everything.

An order that separates admission to office from admission to the caste can afford to be generous with the first, because the first no longer threatens anything. That is the resolution of the question this study opened with, and it is the single thing most worth carrying to the next case.

Where the machinery ran the same

Set the case beside the others and the convergences are unremarkable, which is the point of a framework: it should make the ordinary look ordinary.

There was a floor of force and it was laid in blood — thirty-nine years of it, from a mountain pass to a Taiwanese surrender, with a coast cleared and cities made examples. There was a settlement distributing who got what, sorted by a boundary. There was a robe, and it was borrowed from the audience whose recognition was wanted, and an emperor with uncontested force nonetheless knelt nine times at a dead teacher's shrine to pay for it. There was formation, installed before the age of judgement, by people the child could not do without, in categories rather than in doctrines. There was extraction, arranged so that the state's own take was small and the resented take was somebody else's. There was suppression, aimed precisely at the thing the order could not survive being examined. There was a default running down the hierarchy, holding because every man's next-best position was worse. And the thing came apart not from below but when the class that held it up stopped being paid.

None of that needs a special explanation and none of it distinguishes the Qing from the Normans, the Ptolemies, the Mamluks or the French in Algeria. The machinery is the same machinery.

Where it ran something else

The divergences are where the case earns its place, and there are six.

There was no metropole. This is the largest structural difference and it disposes of an entire family of predictions. Every colonial case in this collection is shaped by a seam running through distance: a home public whose belief funds and mans the conquest, a colonial reality that public must not see, and an order whose central administrative task is keeping the two ends apart. The Qing had none of it. The court was in Beijing from the autumn of 1644, six hundred miles from where it had started and never going back.

There was no home audience to dress for, no parliament to answer, no returning veteran carrying a story that had to be managed.

And so the robe was not reversed. The colonial prediction is that the conqueror's legitimating apparatus is cut for the metropole rather than for the conquered, whose belief the floor does not need. Here the opposite happened, completely: the entire legitimating apparatus was cut for the conquered, in their vocabulary, out of their canon, performed at their shrines. **Remove the metropole and the robe turns to face the governed, because they are the only audience left.**

The conqueror was smaller than the conquered by three orders of magnitude and adopted their entire apparatus rather than importing one. A hundred thousand men entered a country of a hundred and fifty to two hundred million and kept the examinations, the magistracy, the tax registers, the Six Boards, the calendar, the rites, the canon and the law. Nothing in the Qing legitimating or administrative machinery was Manchu in origin. That is the far end of a spectrum whose other end is a conqueror who brings a god, a law and a language and imposes all three.

Formation was given, not withheld. The colonial bend predicts that a conqueror withholds formation from the majority because forming them means admitting them, and that the order therefore stays expensive and brittle. The Qing gave formation at full strength and the order stayed cheap, precisely because the door formation opened was not the door that mattered.

Exit was steered rather than blocked. Every previous case in this collection closes on a mechanism that made the governed capturable — a pass law, a register, a coastline, a debt. Here the state paid people to leave, into Sichuan with land and oxen and seed, and closed only the one frontier it wanted for its caste, where the closure leaked until Han were eighty per cent of the towns. Nobody had to be trapped, and it is much cheaper to have somewhere to put a surplus than to police it where it stands.

The conquest caste was a register rather than a bloodline. By 1648 fewer than one in six bannermen were of Manchu ancestry and roughly three-quarters were in the Han banners; intermarriage was permitted by decree that same year; Han bannermen supplied the majority of early provincial governors. The boundary was enrolment, filled by a recruiting policy that ran for decades before the conquest. The ethnic definition that later hardened around it was a subsequent construction serving a subsequent need, and the need was fiscal.

And the succession was solved by withdrawing information rather than by removing claimants. The name in a box behind a tablet is the cheapest instrument in this entire collection: it leaves every prince in place, capable and ambitious, and removes the single fact around which any of them could be organised.

What this case contributes

Gathering the findings, in the order they were established:

Where a conquered order's legitimating doctrine contains its own transfer clause — a mandate forfeitable by misgovernment, read off the people's condition, with regicide against a forfeiter defined as not regicide — the conqueror needs to build nothing. He needs only to win, and then to perform. The robe is free at the point of acquisition and carries a permanent running cost in suppression, because the canon that admits him also arms whoever comes for his descendants.

Where the conquered order already runs alienable private property in a working register, the conqueror needs no legal fiction about land at all, and the settlement's boundary moves from the deed to the roll. Men with rope walked the fields and that was the entire jurisprudence of the enclosure.

A settlement that pays a hereditary class in claims on a treasury while forbidding it production fails demographically, and when it does the state culls the class rather than reducing the claim — reaching for an ancestry criterion that was not the original condition of entry.

A borrowed robe cannot distinguish a conqueror's subjects from his enemies, because his enemies are wearing it too; so expect a separate, non-doctrinal, bodily mark of submission, and read it as an instrument of the floor. The tell is in the enforcement clause, which here threatened death to officials who might *petition about the policy* rather than to men who failed to comply.

Formation is not doctrine. Its depth is measured by what it makes unthinkable, not by what it makes believed — and the cheapest version is the one the ruled finance themselves, where the state's whole outlay is certification. An imposed formation is fought by the generation that receives it and inherited by their grandchildren, and the tell that it has taken is a piece of vernacular the state never issued.

Where the surplus is extracted privately and the state's cut is trivial, the state gets the compliance and the intermediary gets the hatred. Find the quota, then find who keeps the overage.

Where an order has more than one treasury, check whether the line between them is a caste line, and read the unaudited one as the settlement's real terms.

A private channel to the sovereign is a public silence among his servants. And an order conceals what its legitimacy rests on, so the catalogue of its prosecutions is a map of its load-bearing claim: where the robe is borrowed, the prosecutions will be historical rather than doctrinal.

The strongest default is not the largest benefit but the shortest ladder out. A quota that limits a man also entitles him. And where an order cannot make a link self-defending, it engineers against coordination instead — so its surveillance machinery is its own honest audit of where the defaults were weakest.

A liberty is a distribution of expected loss, and its durability is predictable at the moment of grant by counting the beneficiaries with standing. Where an order forecloses petition, assembly and publication before a claimant class has bargained, the residue that class would have generated never exists.

An order that reforms by abolishing its own recruitment ladder destroys its default faster than any rebellion can. A commander with the force to seize declines when his standing is denominated in a currency only the existing arrangement can mint. And a default can lapse rather than fracture — no battle, no manifesto, a defection counted in jurisdictions.

And an order with intensive agriculture and a state-maintained buffer carries a population above the land's bare capacity; that excess is a debt whose maturity date is the next coordination failure, and it will be recorded in the sources as weather.

The nearest neighbour

If this case has a sibling in the collection it is Ptolemaic Egypt, and the comparison is worth making because of where it breaks.

Both are small foreign military elites installed over ancient, literate, intensively agricultural civilisations with functioning scribal bureaucracies and a settled priestly apparatus. Both took up the local royal idiom entire — the Ptolemies as Pharaoh,

sacrificing in the temples and endowing the priesthoods; the Qing as Son of Heaven, sacrificing at the Altar of Heaven and kneeling at Qufu. Both ran their own separate caste alongside. Both extracted through monopolies rather than through assessment.

The break is at the second door. The Ptolemies never opened the administration to Egyptians on anything approaching the Qing scale; Greek remained the language of government and Greek descent the qualification for its upper reaches, and the result was a permanent parallelism that never resolved and a dynasty that stayed foreign for three centuries. The Qing opened office to the conquered immediately and completely and closed only the caste — and got, in exchange, a Chinese officialdom that defended a Manchu throne for two hundred and sixty-eight years and had to be pushed away from it by the throne's own reform programme.

The lesson is not that the Qing were cleverer. It is that a conqueror who can separate office from caste has an instrument a conqueror who cannot has to do without — and whether he can depends almost entirely on whether the conquered order already manufactures its own officials, which is a fact about the conquered rather than a choice of the conqueror's.

The case for the defence

The brief for this study requires the strongest counter-position stated fully and answered without flinching, and the counter-position here is much stronger than the genre usually allows. It is not a defence in the colonial mode — no civilising mission, no burden, no bringing of law to the lawless. It is simpler and harder to answer.

It runs like this.

The Qing did not find a golden age and destroy it. They found a state in terminal fiscal failure, a countryside in famine, an army that had decayed into a registration category, rebel armies burning the capital, and an emperor hanging from a tree behind his own palace. What they built on that ruin was a hundred and thirteen years without a general war, in a civilisation that had just endured a generation of them.

Under them the population of China tripled, which is to say that several hundred million people who would otherwise not have existed, lived. They ran the most extensive famine-relief system anywhere in the pre-modern world, and it worked for a century — grain moved between provinces, granaries in every county seat, ordinary bad years met.

They froze the land tax for a hundred and fifty years and abolished the head tax on the landless entirely, so that the poorest man in the empire paid the state nothing directly at all. They abolished hereditary debased status. They gave China the borders it has now.

They took, from an ordinary subject, something on the order of a day or two of wages a year, and employed twenty-seven thousand officials to govern four hundred million people, and maintained no police force whatever. By the standards of any contemporary European state that is an astonishingly light hand.

And — this is the part that is hardest to dismiss — the Chinese elite chose it. Not once, under duress, but continuously, for two and a half centuries. Nobody compelled Zeng Guofan to save the dynasty in 1864 when he had three hundred thousand men and could have taken it. The gentry of every county in China administered it, defended it, and staffed it, and when they finally walked away in 1911 it was not because they had discovered they were oppressed but because the dynasty had abolished the examinations six years earlier and cut their standing out from under them. The story of a nation groaning under a foreign yoke is a story the revolutionaries of 1911 had to manufacture, by reprinting seventeenth-century massacre accounts that had passed out of common memory, to a population that by then regarded the conquerors' haircut as its own national custom.

Every sentence of that is true, and the study has established most of it itself.

The answer

Take it in three parts, because it fails in three different places and only the third one matters much.

The goods were real and they were by-products. Peace, granaries, a frozen tax and a tripled population were not the arrangement's purpose; they were what holding an agrarian empire cheaply looks like when it is done competently. A ruler who wants two hundred million people to keep producing a surplus he can take a slice of has every reason to keep them alive, unmolested and in their villages, and the granary and the tax freeze are instruments of that interest before they are anything else. This does not make them fake — a granary full of grain is full of grain whatever the intention behind it, and thirteen million people did not die in 1877 because the intention was impure. But it does mean the goods cannot be entered as evidence of the arrangement's *character*, because an arrangement with the opposite character would have produced them too if it had wanted the same surplus.

And the same competence produced the other column. The reign of the granaries and the Four Treasuries is the reign that destroyed seventy to eighty per cent of a people on the north-west frontier by explicit imperial order and repopulated their land with settlers. The state that could not police a village could clear a thousand miles of coastline for twenty-two years. The dynasty that left theology entirely free executed a man for a private history of the Ming and beheaded the people who owned copies. None of this was decadence or breakdown; all of it was the same apparatus working well. **Competence is not a moral category, and an order's efficiency at producing goods is exactly its efficiency at producing whatever else it decides it needs.**

But the third part is where the defence actually fails, and it fails on its own strongest ground. The elite did choose it — and that is precisely what this study has spent twelve modules measuring. A degree-holder whose exemptions, standing, local monopoly and access to office all issued from a register the state maintained, who had watched thousands of his kind struck off that register in Jiangnan in 1661 for tax arrears, and who could not petition, associate or publish because a stone in his schoolyard forbade it, was not weighing the dynasty against alternatives. He was defending the only position available to him, which is what the default *is*. Consent manufactured by an arrangement's own distribution of positions is evidence about the arrangement's design, not about its justice. The gentry's two and a half centuries of loyalty prove that the Qing settlement was extremely well built. They prove nothing whatever about whether it was good, and the argument that treats the one as the other is the settlement's own account of itself.

And the flinch that has to be refused on the other side

Having said that, the opposite error is available and is worse, and this collection's discipline forbids it.

None of the above makes the belief false or the believers dupes. Zeng Guofan's Confucianism was not a rationalisation; it was the structure of his mind, and he stood down an army because of it. The Kangxi emperor built a hall for the worship of Confucius inside his own palace where the only audience was himself. The queue, imposed by massacre in 1645 on a population whose first schoolbook told them their hair belonged to their parents, was by 1900 defended by the men wearing it as Chinese custom — and they were not confused. They were carrying a thing that had become

theirs by the only route anything ever becomes anyone's, which is by being there before they were.

Naming an origin as built does not make what grew from it a lie. It makes it a thing that was built and then became real — and a built thing that became real is more durable, and more genuinely held, than any lie could be. The whole reason the Qing arrangement is worth a study of this length is that it worked, that the people inside it believed it, and that most of them were right to, given where they were standing.

What the study can offer is not a verdict. It is a description precise enough that a reader can see the machinery, locate the position each person occupied inside it, and understand why a man there would have thought and done what he thought and did. Whether the whole was worth its price is not a question a framework can answer, and any framework that offers to answer it has stopped measuring and started preaching.

The arithmetic is on the page. The sum is the reader's, and so — this being the only part of it that is not history — is the question of which position in such an arrangement he currently occupies.

A note on sources. This module makes no new factual claims and quotes nothing; every fact in it has been established, with its sources and its uncertainties, in the eleven modules preceding, and the ranges and cautions recorded there apply here unchanged. Three things nevertheless need flagging. First, the comparisons drawn to other conquests in this collection rest on their historical subjects and not on my having read the sibling studies: the characterisation of the Mamluk recruitment logic follows the account of that case I have read; the comparison with Ptolemaic Egypt is drawn from general knowledge of that period rather than from the study of it in this collection, and anyone using the parallel should check it against that study, which may well have found something that qualifies it. Second, the claim that the Ptolemies never opened their administration to Egyptians on anything approaching the Qing scale is a broad-brush statement about a three-century period in which Egyptian participation in the bureaucracy in fact varied considerably, particularly in the later dynasty and at the lower levels; it is offered as a contrast of magnitude and should not be pressed as a claim about any particular reign. Third, the case for the defence set out above is a composite: it is not quoted from any historian and no one scholar advances it in that form, though its individual elements are all defended somewhere in the literature — the achievements by the New Qing History scholarship and by the economic historians of the high Qing, the argument about elite consent by the work on the 1911 revolution that emphasises gentry agency, and the

observation about the manufactured revival of seventeenth-century massacre memory by the scholarship on late-Qing anti-Manchu nationalism. Assembling them into their strongest joint form is this study's own doing, and the assembly is the fairest version I could construct rather than a straw one.